United Nations S/PV.7893

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7893rd meeting

Tuesday, 28 February 2017, 11.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 24 February 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/170)

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17-05288 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 24 February 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/170)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/172, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/170, which contains a letter dated 24 February 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): For months now, France, the United Kingdom and the United States have sought to unite the Security Council in response to the heinous crimes committed in Syria involving the repeated, corroborated use of chemical weapons against civilians over several years. These criminal acts continue today, as we speak. We must put an end to them.

The stakes involved are extremely serious, above and beyond the situation in Syria. More than a century ago, the world learned with dismay of the horrors of chemical warfare when chlorine gas was first used against civilians on 15 April 1915 in Ypres, Belgium. The international community decided at that time that it was duty-bound to ensure that such atrocities never recur.

The current retrogression is therefore especially terrible. What we once thought impossible is now an imminent danger; what we had once thought to be in the past is happening right now before our very eyes. Prohibited weapons have been used several times in the Syrian conflict, despite that fact that 192 States are committed, through their ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, to never using such weapons again and to destroying their existing stockpiles.

I call on all present to fully grasp the extent of our responsibility today. We face not only the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; we face the repeated, methodical and barbarous use of weapons of mass destruction — in this case, chemical weapons — against civilians. On the scale of threats to international peace and security, we have hit 10. That is why France believes that weakness and inaction are not and cannot be an option. It is why, I recall, that the members of the Security Council, together and unanimously, in September 2013 resolutely decided that

> "in the event of non-compliance with this resolution, including unauthorized transfer of chemical weapons, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic, to impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter" (*resolution 2118 (2013), para. 21*).

Today we have reached this moment of truth, when it is no longer a matter of evading or looking away. Many instances of the use of chemical weapons have been confirmed and continue to be

reported — very accurately, professionally and methodically. The responsibility of the Syrian regime was established in three of such cases without any ambiguity at all. The Joint Investigative Mechanism has also demonstrated the responsibility of the Da'esh terrorist organization in a case of chemical attack. It is now up to the Security Council, as guardian of our system of collective security, to act and not just talk. It has the duty and the responsibility to do so, as it has committed itself to do. This is a necessity consistent with the establishment of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, on which the Council has reiterated its confidence.

The continuation of the work of the Mechanism, decided unanimously with the adoption of resolution 2319 (2016) last November, has been indispensable. But that cannot delay or supplant a vital action on our part to sanction those who have flouted the prohibition: an action drawing the necessary conclusions from established determinations by a Mechanism that we unanimously renewed, and an action, finally, to send a warning and a message of firmness against those who would consider breaking the taboo in the future. By putting off acting on the demand for justice to which we have collectively committed, abdicating our responsibility, would send an irresponsible signal of impunity, which we must avoid.

My country, which has long been engaged in the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cannot accept that. The international situation in which we find ourselves calls for our immediate and firm reaction. It is up to us to protect the chemical non-proliferation regime, and with it all non-proliferation regimes. That is a treasure we possess, for which we are responsible and of which we are the guardians.

We come late to this today. That is why France, together with its British and American partners, wanted to engage in good faith in a negotiation to bring together all the members of the Council around to the appropriate response. The result of our efforts has produced a balanced proposal aimed at punishing all the actors involved that is based on targeted measures.

First, the draft resolution (S/2017/172), which provides for the adoption of measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, identifies a violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and condemns the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Secondly, it reaffirms the Council's conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be prosecuted. Thirdly, it reiterates the need for the Syrian regime to comply with all its international obligations. Fourthly, it reaffirms all measures taken against Da'esh and the terrorist groups listed by the Council. Fifthly, it reiterates the measures specific to the sanctions regime. It establishes a sanctions committee, supported by a panel of experts. It establishes the appropriate criteria for listing entities and individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons, in connection with which it includes a list of entities and individuals. And it establishes an embargo on sensitive chemicals and on weapons and materials that could be used to import dangerous chemical substances, as well as on helicopters.

An inability to act, as I said, would constitute a blameworthy move backward for the Council. Beyond our political divisions, we have in the past been able to mobilize in unison on non-proliferation issues. If today we are not able to discuss and agree on issues of such gravity, if we are not able to echo the collective consciousness of humankind, we will have failed in our responsibilities. Our credibility is at stake.

In the noisy clamour of our world, there are moments of truth when we can no longer dodge our responsibilities. This vote is that moment of truth, when our fundamental basic values, the law and our security are at stake. Values: who would not prosecute those who have killed innocent women and children in cold blood, in the most atrocious and reprehensible of conditions? That would be a negation of our entire civilization. The law: the Council has been unanimous in saying that we must prosecute those responsible for those murdered with chemical weapons. What are we waiting for in implementing laws that we ourselves have contributed to putting in place? Lastly, our security: if we close our eyes to the use of chemical weapons against civilians, what legitimacy will we have tomorrow to condemn nuclear terrorism or apocalyptic attacks using bacteriological agents? Who would be responsible before history?

At stake today are not tactical interests; at stake are the very fundamental values of our security. The world is watching and waiting on us. Let us rise to our responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. Let us rise to ensure the power of the law in the service of the values of the United Nations and the interests of present and future generations. If for dubious reasons we do not succeed today, know that France will never give up.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The Security Council is about to be asked a simple question: Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It is that simple. Will we take action on behalf of those whose lives have been destroyed by these senseless weapons? Will we take action for people like Mohammed Abdul-Razzuk Alhashash? Thanks to the testimony of those on the ground, we know that Mohammed was admitted to hospital at 1.30 p.m. on 21 April 2014. A couple of hours earlier, a Syrian regime helicopter had dropped two containers on his home town of Talmenes, exposing him and many others to a yellow toxic gas.

After the attack, Mohammed was unable to breathe. He lost consciousness. On arrival at hospital he was intubated under mechanical ventilation. His face went red. Pink foam poured from his mouth. His pupils were dilated. His lungs were crackling. His heartbeat and breathing stopped. Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation was performed, but all attempts to revive him failed. Mohammad died at two o'clock. He was six years old.

Mohammed is why we are here today. We are here in the Chamber to begin to bring justice for him, for his family and for the hundreds, if not thousands, of other Syrians whose stories are all too similar to his own. This is not about politics. At its core this is not really about the Joint Investigative Mechanism or about the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons — respectively, the JIM and the OPCW, but forget the acronyms. This is not even about Syria. This is about taking a stand when children are poisoned. It is that simple. It is about taking a stand when civilians are maimed and murdered with toxic weapons — weapons used in complete disregard for the international rules and norms that we all claim to uphold.

Therefore, in a moment, when we are asked to vote on this draft resolution (S/2017/172), I hope that all members of the Council will lift their hands in favour of this text, and do so with Mohammed in their minds.

The President: The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

France, Italy, Japan, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

Against:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Russian Federation

Abstaining:

Egypt, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan

The President: There were 9 votes in favour, 3 against and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): When members of the Security Council speak about the use of chemical weapons, it is pretty amazing because there is unity in the fact that we need to be concerned about chemical-weapon use in Syria and elsewhere. That is why the blocking of the draft resolution (S/2017/172) today is so troubling.

Russia and China made an outrageous and indefensible choice today. They refused to hold Bashar Al-Assad's regime accountable for the use of chemical weapons. They turned away from defenceless men, women and children who died gasping for breath when Al-Assad's forces dropped their poisonous gas. They ignored the facts. They put their friends in the Al-Assad regime ahead of our global security.

The Security Council banned the Al-Assad regime from holding onto any chemical weapons in 2013. Still, Al-Assad arrogantly continued to use these savage weapons. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons sent a fact-finding mission to Syria to investigate. The fact-finding mission confirmed that chemical weapons were used, but it lacked a mandate to say who was responsible, and therefore the Security Council unanimously agreed to set up the Joint Investigative Mechanism to answer this obvious question: If chemical-weapon attacks are happening in Syria, who is involved? At that time, everyone on the Security Council, including Russia and China, said that they wanted to know who used chemical weapons.

The question was answered. However, Russia and China did not like the answer. The investigators spent a year collecting mountains of evidence, speaking to witnesses and verifying testimony. The conclusion was, and remains, irrefutably clear: the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons three times from 2014 to 2015,

and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) used chemical weapons once. Those are of course only the attacks that could be confirmed with limited time and resources. There are credible reports that Al-Assad used chemical weapons many more times. Amazingly, members are willing to condemn ISIL for the one incident, but turn a blind eye to the Member State Syria, which committed this crime at least three times.

Russia and China now say they have questions about the investigation. They sat through almost a year of briefings by the investigators and they never objected to their work. But now they suddenly say that the investigation was just not enough. Russia's suggestion is for the Al-Assad regime to investigate itself for use of chemical weapons. Are we going to have ISIL investigate itself too? There is nothing wrong with the investigation. Russia just does not want to criticize the Al-Assad regime for using chemical weapons. That is the truth.

What is the message we are sending to the world? China and Russia will cover the backs of their friends and allies who use chemical weapons to kill their own people. Some say we should focus more on ISIL. The United States condemns any use of chemical weapons — by ISIL or any other non-State actor. We are determined to defeat ISIL, and we will defeat ISIL. Its use of chemical weapons only adds to the urgency of doing that. But the barbarity of ISIL is no excuse for Al-Assad's own barbarity. Both used chemical weapons. Both should face the consequences.

Other Council members say the timing is not right for a resolution, or that we should delay the vote for the sake of Council unity. But let us remember: because the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons, people died in one of the most brutal ways possible. We got confirmation of the Syrian regime's involvement. The question should not be whether to wait longer; the question should be why we have not acted sooner.

Let us step back from the Security Council. The reason we all should care about this draft resolution is that we want to make sure that no one ever thinks about using chemical weapons. Watch some of the videos online from the regime's chemical-weapon attacks in Syria. Watch the rows of parents and children lying on the ground suffocated to death. Watch Syrians gasping for breath in makeshift hospitals, desperate for oxygen to stop from gagging on chlorine. The suffering is inhumane. It is grotesque. It should shake every one of us to our core. None of us should hesitate to impose consequences for these attacks. No one else should get the idea that they can use chemical weapons.

Shamefully, today's draft resolution was not adopted. The names of people and companies involved in Al-Assad's use of chemical weapons are public — all listed in the annex of the draft resolution for everyone to see. The United States has already designated for sanctions every person and every entity listed in the annex. We will work with our European Union and other like-minded partners to push for similar sanctions as soon as possible. We will not forget the overwhelming suffering caused by Al-Assad's use of chemical weapons.

For my friends in Russia, this draft resolution is very appropriate. It is a sad day in the Security Council. When members start making excuses for other Member States killing their own people, the world is definitely a more dangerous place. Today the international community can look no further than the Security Council for contributing to that.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I am appalled that Russia vetoed today's draft resolution (S/2017/172), and I am surprised and disappointed that China chose to join it, at complete odds with the principles of non-proliferation that both China and Russia claim to support so strongly. As permanent members of the Security Council and as parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and China have a clear responsibility to take action against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. By vetoing the draft resolution today they have undermined the credibility of the Security Council and of the international rules preventing the use of these barbaric weapons.

In resolution 2118 (2013) we all agreed — Russia and China included — that any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic would lead to the Security Council imposing measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Thanks to those vetoes today, we have failed to do so.

This was not a political text. It was a technical draft resolution in response to an impartial and factual report by the Security Council-mandated United Nations-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). It was a report we all called for. It was an investigation we all supported.

But instead of backing the draft resolution, we have seen yet again that Russia is prepared to abuse its veto power to stand by a regime that has no regard for its own people, that has no regard for the basic rules of war or international treaties, a regime that has indiscriminately bombed and besieged its own people, a regime that has turned chemical weapons on its own population, killing 6-year-old children like Mohammad.

This is Russia's seventh veto on the subject of Syria in five years. What further evidence do we need that Russia will always prioritize the Al-Assad regime over the protection of the Syrian people? Today we have learned that they will plunge to new depths, that they would rather cover up for Al-Assad than prevent the further use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

The Russians will say that this draft resolution was based on weak or flawed evidence, but the JIM was a fully independent United Nations mechanism that Russia created. Russia agreed to the methodology that the JIM would apply, and yet when it came up with an answer that Russia did not like, all of a sudden there was a problem. Russia's answer is that Syria should conduct its own investigation. The idea that the guilty party should investigate itself is absurd, and it is clearly on record that the Syrian regime has obstructed the JIM investigation.

Russia will claim that the JIM does not meet a legal standard of evidence, but it was never intended to. As we all agreed, in resolution 2235 (2015), it was meant to examine the available evidence in an impartial manner and come to a conclusion. Russia will claim that we should be focusing on the use of chemical weapons by Da'esh. But we already have robust and comprehensive measures in place to combat Da'esh. Today's draft resolution would have reaffirmed our commitment to those measures and reiterated our condemnation of Da'esh. Russia will say that supporting this draft resolution would disrupt the Syrian political process. That is simply not true. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Russia and everyone else, through the United Nations, to help the Syrian people reach a lasting political settlement. But not taking action against the use of chemical weapons undermines confidence in the international community's ability to tackle flagrant violations of international law. It undermines the confidence and trust of the ordinary Syrians affected by these horrific attacks, and that is no way to build the right conditions for successful political talks.

Despite Russia and China's actions, I would like to reiterate our thanks to the JIM for its work, and to the international partners who helped it. Because of that tireless work, we know without doubt that the Al-Assad regime and Da'esh used toxic chemicals as weapons against civilians in Syria. Those responsible for such attacks remain free and unpunished to this day. Today we had a chance to step up and begin to end that impunity. Instead, Russia and China have let down the people of Marea, Talmenes, Sarmin and Qmenas, and the wider international community that seeks justice for those horrific attacks. Without a clear response to those flagrant abuses of international law, the Al-Assad regime is only going to be emboldened to preserve its chemical weapon capabilities and continue to use them. We should all be concerned about the reports of further use of chemical weapons in Syria, most recently in Aleppo and eastern Hama last year.

In response to today's vetoes, Da'esh, too, will surely only be encouraged to continue using chemical weapons — something that Russia claims to oppose. And the longer-term credibility and utility of the Chemical Weapons Convention will also suffer. But the United Kingdom will not let Russia's actions today stop us from working with international partners to see justice done for the victims and to prevent the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere. That includes the international, impartial and independent mechanism for Syria agreed on by the General Assembly last year. We must be able to demonstrate that the international system works and that we are able to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons to account. Anything less is not an option.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation voted against today's draft resolution (S/2017/172), on imposing sanctions Syria, because its authors' concept, which by its very nature is offensive and flawed, is totally unacceptable. The fact that the draft resolution failed to receive six Council members' votes out of 15 should give its authors serious reason to think. The statements we have heard have left us in no doubt that the draft resolution was based on the Western capitals' anti-regime doctrine. As for the insulting remarks about Russia, China and other States, we leave them to their consciences and may God be their judge. Let us try to sort out what really took place.

When the draft resolution first saw the light, at the beginning of December 2016, we expressed our concerns

on a number of occasions, collectively and separately, to each co-sponsor. Our scepticism about the conclusions of the third and fourth reports (see S/2016/738/Rev.1 and S/2016/888) of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations to investigate cases of the use of chemical weapons in Syria is well known. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, late Permanent Representative of Russia, had already made detailed comments highlighting their uncorroborated conclusions, and at that point we thought we had made things quite clear. Apparently not. From the point of view of their practical legal application, the JIM's conclusions are not based on convincing facts on which any sort of charges could be founded. Moreover, they take no account of the fact that besides the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, there is widespread use of toxic substances in Syria by the Al-Nusra Front as well as numerous opposition groups on the ground, including for purposes of provocation aimed at discrediting the country's armed forces and its leadership.

The problem is that the work of the experts in Syria is based on questionable information provided by the armed opposition sympathetic international non-governmental organizations, the media and so-called friends of Syria. At the same time, the attitude to requests from Damascus about the investigations is one of shrugging contempt, as was clearly demonstrated in the report of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission on an incident that occurred on 2 August of last year in Aleppo. No wonder, when two thirds of the Mission's expert team was staffed by representatives from a single group of countries. Its geographic balance is in urgent need of correction. Let us be frank: the whole thing strengthens the impression that the authors of the draft text submitted for a vote today needed the Joint Investigative Mechanism for the sole purpose of laying responsibility for the use of chemical weapons at the door of Al-Assad's Government, thereby creating additional reasons for regime change in Damascus. We should once again emphasize that this obsession with that destructive geopolitical project continues to be an obstacle to the ability to think clearly and weigh decisions carefully with the goal of reaching a political settlement, not just in Syria but in a number of other trouble spots in the Middle East.

When we created the JIM and agreed to extend its work for another year, it was on the clear understanding of the nature of the threat posed to this troubled region by the use of chemical weapons by terrorist organizations. Today that dangerous trend threatens to spill beyond the borders of the Middle East. We were led by the expectation that the Mechanism's work would be founded on a basis of impartiality and on established facts, not assumptions, conjectures or fabrications. In that regard, the Mechanism needs to seriously rethink the principles behind its work. We believe that, as envisaged in resolution 2319 (2016), the Mechanism's activities will go beyond Syria to include its neighbouring countries, and that its mandate will provide for real counter-terrorism measures. Much remains to be clarified in that regard, including enabling Damascus, in accordance with its obligations under article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to appropriately conclude a comprehensive national investigation verifying the facts laid out in the JIM's reports. What is there to say about a situation when the investigators did not actually travel to the places where the crimes were alleged to have been committed?

Based on the unconvincing findings of the JIM's reports in today's draft resolution, there is no justification for concluding that Damascus has failed to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention or has violated resolution 2118 (2013), despite the fact that resolution 2118 (2013) was seen as a huge success for the Security Council in its unprecedented disarming of Syria's chemical weapons. The draft resolution envisages applying sanctions similar to those that have been imposed on other countries. Working from this type of carbon copy is totally unacceptable. The authors of the draft resolution have gone as far as to propose financial, economic and other restrictions on specific individuals and legal entities.

However, they do not bother to provide justification for the establishment of sanctions lists. The JIM has not spoken about any Syrian officials, scientific institutions or economic entities. This is a clear attempt to prejudge the outcomes of the investigations. When agreeing upon this draft resolution, we were told that it served the goal of non-proliferation. However, if one reads this voluminous document, it becomes absolutely clear that the point is to levy sanctions against Damascus, under imagined pretexts.

We are seeing a clear trend of bringing powerful political pressure to bear on the Mechanism and pre-programming the results of the investigation. The Mechanism is being forced to set aside the principles of objectivity, independence and impartiality, which were

set forth in the resolution tht established it. No lessons have been learned from the past. I recall the tragedy that occurred as a result of the pressure brought to bear on the Special Commission on Iraq, and then on the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission. It seems the Council has forgotten that this marked the very beginning of destabilization in the Middle East. We have no right to repeat such a thing.

The annex of the draft resolution refers to a ban on the provision to Syria of a large number of chemical substances, the majority of which have nothing to do with the CWC. An embargo on the exports of this country can adversely affect the fulfilment of major agricultural and economic needs, in particular given that there are already unilateral sanctions in place. A ban on the provision of helicopters, spare parts and services could indeed be seen as an attempt to undermine the counter-terrorism efforts being undertaken by Damascus, not to mention the critical role played by small aircraft in resolving humanitarian issues in an armed conflict.

We truly wonder against whom and to what end this draft resolution has been crafted. It lay on the shelves for three months and underwent no significant change despite our numerous observations and the alternative we proposed on how joint work could be organized to combat chemical terrorism in the region. Nevertheless, the draft resolution was brought to the Security Council for a vote in the context of the efforts undertaken in Geneva and Astana to establish an intra-Syrian political dialogue to settle the crisis. This is a railroading of the draft by the Western troika of permanent Security Council members. We see this as an attempt to retard and undermine current political and diplomatic efforts. We have seen the same scenario before. They say one thing and then do something completely different. The sponsors were unable to recognize the inappropriateness and untimeliness of measures; nor were they able to recognize the real threat of chemical terrorism in the Middle East. They do not understand that unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Damascus will only weaken the international counter-terrorism effort.

In spite of our consistent appeals, the sponsors preferred a politically biased approach, leading to confrontation and an exacerbation of the situation, including in the Security Council. They heated things up intentionally, well aware that the initiative had no chance of being adopted in the Security Council. In that context, we had no other choice than to block this draft resolution. The sanctions list contained therein was taken from analogous American lists approved at the beginning of this year by the outgoing United States Administration. One should not turn it all around, get it all backwards, create virtual pictures. Today's confrontation is not a result of our negative vote, it is a result of the fact that the sponsors opted for provocation, all the while knowing our position.

Furthermore, we would like to underscore that, in voting against this draft resolution, we voted against confrontation. By doing so, we demonstrated that confrontation is doomed to failure. It should be a thing of the past. We are sending a message: only through cooperation will we be able to resolve the most difficult of tasks and move forward in finding a solution to the Syrian crisis. It is high time that we do so by creating a broad counter-terrorism front.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Japan supported and co-sponsored the draft resolution (S/2017/172) proposed by France, the United Kingdom and the United States. We firmly believe that the Security Council needs to show its shared determination that the use of chemical weapons is not permissible under any circumstances, and that the Council will hold accountable those who are responsible.

Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in resolution 2118 (2013) we as a Council decided to impose measures in the event of any use of chemical weapons in Syria by anyone. This is the starting point. Then the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was established and its mandate renewed unanimously. The JIM drew conclusions from its impartial, objective and independent investigation. In the view of Japan, it is our primary responsibility to implement what we have decided as a Council. Regrettably, today the proposed draft resolution was not adopted. However, I believe and hope there is unity inside the Council on the necessity to hold accountable those who are responsible for the use of chemical weapons. The Council needs to continue to explore ensuring accountability.

As for the issue of timing, we heard an argument that this moment is not opportune in the light of the political process in Geneva. There is no question about the Council's unanimous support for the political process led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. However, it is not a question of whether the timing is good or not for

the Council to take measures to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a signatory to the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, Uruguay is committed to preventing and putting an end to such horrendous crimes. In that regard, we can only lament the use of the veto in the case of this draft resolution (S/2017/172). My delegation believes that ensuring accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria is essential, not only for reasons of justice but also to put an end to and prevent such heinous acts.

It was not a perfect text, but it did constitute a first step towards ensuring accountability for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict, based on the conclusions of the third and fourth reports (see S/2016/738/Rev.1 and S/2016/888) of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which established responsibility for four out of nine alleged cases of use investigated. The sanctions regime that we were prepared to implement, like other Council sanctions regimes in force, could subsequently have been reviewed and improved upon by the panel of experts that would have been established for that purpose.

We reiterate that these crimes must not go unpunished, whether committed by the members of the Government, the Syrian armed forces, terrorist groups or non-State armed groups. We call on all members of the Council to continue to seek consensus that would allow us, as soon as possible, to adopt measures to punish those responsible, and therefore to prevent new incidents of chemical-weapon use against the already hard-hit civilian population of Syria.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thanks to the joint efforts by the international community, the ceasefire in Syria has been generally preserved recently. A new round of Geneva peace talks is under way. A rare opportunity has emerged in terms of finding a political solution to the question of Syria. Under the current circumstances, the international community should remain committed to a political solution, consolidate the positive momentum through coordinated actions and encourage the parties in Syria to maintain the ceasefire and dialogue so as to find a way out that is acceptable to all the parties as soon as possible.

The Security Council's action on the question of Syria should take into account the importance of maintaining the ceasefire, finding a political solution, working together to counter terrorism and providing humanitarian assistance. That should be in the interest of stabilizing the situation in Syria as soon as possible. Anyone truly interested in the fundamental interests of the people of Syria and the Middle East would do nothing that ran counter to such interests. Regardless of the rhetoric and no matter how elegant it might sound, anything that runs counter to the fundamental interests of the people of Syria and the region should not be allowed by the Council.

China's position on the issue of chemical weapons is clear and consistent: we oppose the use of chemical weapons by any State, organization or individual under any circumstances, and call for punishing all instances of chemical weapons use. China has itself been a victim of the use of chemical weapons by other States. The Chinese people are more justified than any other party to express their opposition to the use of chemical weapons. China is deeply concerned about and strongly condemns the use of chemical as weapons that has occurred within Syria.

With regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Council has in the past achieved important results in terms of destroying the stockpile of chemical weapons in Syria. At present, investigations on the use of chemicals as weapons are ongoing, and it is therefore too early to reach a final conclusion. The Council should preserve its unity and continue to support the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism so that it can carry out its investigations in a professional matter, based on objective and fair criteria and in accordance with the mandate that was conferred to it by resolution 2319 (2016). Relevant conclusions must be based on accurate, detailed and solid evidence that can truly stand the test of history.

As we all recall, the purported existence of weapons of mass destruction was used in the past to unleash a war that has brought untold suffering to the people in the Middle East. Countries in the Middle East remain beset today by the legacy of that war. The lessons of history must be learned. Only in that way can mistakes be avoided in the future.

The draft resolution (S/2017/172) is based on conclusions on which the parties continue to have differences. It was forced through to a vote, although Council members still had serious differences. That is

in no way helpful to finding a solution to the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, and it is not conducive to the peace talks in Geneva and the political process on the question of Syria in general.

China has been working tirelessly to help bring about a solution to the issue of Syria, supports the United Nations as the major player in terms of good offices and has been facilitating finding a settlement among the parties that is acceptable to all through peaceful negotiations and based on the principle of a Syrian-owned and -led process. China will continue to play a constructive role in finding a political solution to this issue with a view to arriving at a comprehensive, fair and appropriate solution to the question of Syria.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that the Security Council is the core of our collective security regime. Every Council member bears the sacred responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and should define its national position in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and on the merits of the case under discussion. Unprovoked and distorted attacks against the solemn position of other members represent a very irresponsible action. In the words of the representative of the United Kingdom, it is really absurd. In and of itself, that serves as a good example of how certain countries are using rhetoric as a means of last resort and with ulterior motives.

What all Council members should do is deeply reflect on the situation in Syria and the Middle East, on how it has been allowed to deteriorate to its current level, and on the role that each and everyone of us has played — and on whether that role should or should not be praised. It is only by doing so that we can be regarded as acting responsibly with regard to the people of Syria and the region. Dealing with people solely through rhetorical flourishes is complete hypocrisy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): As a sponsor that voted in favour of today's draft resolution (S/2017/172), Italy regrets that the Security Council was unable to adopt the text submitted by France, the United Kingdom and the United States. We thank those delegations for their efforts.

Of course, we had hoped that the unity of the Council would be preserved in support of the draft resolution, and my delegation had worked in that direction during negotiations and consultations. The initiative is about ensuring a meaningful follow-up to the reports of an impartial instrument that the Council established, supported and renewed unanimously, thereby clearly backing its methodology, professionalism and impartiality. Looking ahead, we are encouraged that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) is about to resume its activities. We remain strongly committed to supporting it and upholding the findings of its future. Investigations. Italy voted in favour of the draft resolution for three main reasons.

First, in the light of our long-standing position on non-proliferation issues, which must be kept separate from other more political considerations, we strongly condemn the use of any chemical weapon or toxic chemical anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstance, whether by State or non-State actors. Today more than ever, we must uphold the values and principles of international law and of the international non-proliferation regime and avoid its weakening, which would encourage anyone willing to resort to a barbaric form of warfare and aggression.

Secondly, we voted in favour of the draft resolution to show our credibility and the deterrence role of the JIM. We continue to support the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and its staff, whom we commend for their dedication and professionalism. It is an essential instrument in attributing responsibility for such heinous attacks. The Council established the JIM because it felt the need to see the responsibility for chemical-weapon attacks attributed to those behind such horrific attacks. As its reports indicate, the JIM has done just what the Council had asked it to do, while abiding by the standards that the Security Council had set out. Its task was to identify to greatest extent feasible those who were perpetrators of chemical-weapon attacks. Today's draft resolution was meant to ensure meaningful follow-up to work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The third, and final, reason that we voted in favour relates to accountability. Simply identifying which party is responsible is not enoug; those who planned, ordered and executed the attacks must face justice. The Council has a shared responsibility to uphold the work of the JIM and ensure meaningful follow-up in terms of holding individuals and/or entities accountable for their unacceptable and criminal acts.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia reiterates its strongest and

most absolute condemnation and rejection of the use of chemical weapons and toxic substances, regardless of who uses them or their reasons for doing so or where such acts are perpetrated. Those responsible must be duly investigated, tried and punished to the fullest extent. The use of chemical weapons violates obligations under international law.

Bolivia voted against the draft resolution (S/2017/172) put forward today, which proposed a sanctions mechanism on the Government of Syria for using chemical weapons. Moreover, however, the draft resolution included an annex with a list of people and companies subject to the sanctions. None of the lists annexed to the draft resolution was compiled by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was established to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The names of the people and companies mentioned in the draft resolution did not come from the Panel of Experts of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. That list therefore violates the right to due process. A few years ago, in this very Chamber, so-called proof of weapons of mass destruction was found in that same region of the world. That ended with a country being invaded and left approximately 1 million people dead. Allow us, therefore, to challenge the information presented to us in today's draft resolution.

In the same vein, we believe that it is important that the Joint Investigative Mechanism be given more time to complete its work. We hope that its future reports will be completed with the highest level of transparency and political independence and that they can shed more light on developments.

It is also important to point out that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), which we chair, is a body that addresses the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and chemical, biological and nuclear weapons by non-State actors. In that regard, its work is in no way related to the issue of imposing sanctions on Syria. Its focus is on ensuring that groups such as Islamic State do not possess such weapons.

We believe that those reasons were enough to vote against the draft resolution. I nevertheless believe that it is the Security Council's duty to look at the political context and situation above and beyond the contents the draft resolution. Bolivia has paid great attention to the comments made by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, who stated that the region's current ceasefire, which has indisputably led to a considerable reduction in violence, is one of the few remaining glimmers of hope for a political process and a path to peace in Syria.

At the same time, we believe that these types of initiatives — which, I reiterate, are not based on sufficient concrete facts or on the outcome of full, independent, impartial and conclusive investigations — threaten the ceasefire and, much more important, threaten the peace process being conducted under the auspices of the United Nations.

In that regard, we believe that it is important to ask ourselves why this type of draft resolution was presented to the Council when everyone knew that it would be vetoed. Why were more extensive negotiations not conducted to ensure that members of the Council could participate fully and contribute to the text of the draft resolution? What are the reasons for insisting that the draft resolution be put before the Council — to be vetoed, might I add, once again? The most logical answer that we can find to those questions is that the draft resolution presented today was simply an attempt to use the Security Council for political purposes. The goal was not to seek peace in Syria or to independently and objectively identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the region; rather, it was to launch a political media offensive on members of the Council that voted against the draft resolution.

We believe that it is important to highlight that there were three abstentions and three votes against the draft resolution. We believe that that sends a very strong signal that, unfortunately, when faced with such types of draft resolutions, things are not functioning as they should in the Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are all aware of the magnitude of the crisis that the Syrian people have been facing under the yoke of a conflict that has now entered its seventh year. The conflict has claimed hundreds of thousands of victims and left millions displaced. We all know that achieving swift justice is an integral part of the efforts to reach a final settlement and to put an end to the suffering of Syrians, reuniting them under the flag of a country with control over its territory and that fulfils the hopes its people have for freedom and democracy.

That is why Egypt has advocated, and will always advocate, the notion of accountability in Syria in order

to achieve justice, in particular with regard to crimes that could be considered war crimes, regardless of their perpetrators, and to instances in which it has been proven that chemical weapons have been used against Syrian civilians by more than one party, as stated in the report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, established pursuant to resolution 2235 (2015). The mandate of the Mechanism was renewed by resolution 2319 (2016).

The application of the notion of accountability, in Syria or elsewhere, means having a number of elements in place. If one or more of those elements is absent, such accountability would become a politicized measure that would end up deepening the crisis in Syria and having an adverse effect on the prospects for the political process. Despite the fact that the draft resolution (S/2017/172) put before the Security Council today purports to ensure accountability and achieve justice, for unknown reasons it ignores one of the main elements that I have mentioned, that is, evidence.// Let me remind Council members ....

Let me remind Council members that the common practice when introducing sanctions against individuals or entities implicated in specific crimes as serious as those we consider today is to establish a sanctions committee through a Security Council resolution. Such a committee would evaluate the evidence provided in connection with the individuals or entities accused of using chemical weapons. The names of those entities or individuals would then be included on the sanctions list. Those steps are aimed at guaranteeing the transparency of justice.

What we have before us today is supposedly not a political measure to impose sanctions on a given country, but rather accountability for explicit accusations against individuals because of their implication in clear crimes. Nevertheless, we are surprised that those usual steps have been skipped. The proposed draft resolution includes in its annexes a pre-identified list of individuals and entities that would be subject to those sanctions and whom the co-sponsors perceive to be primarily responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

We see that as a premature judgment of the reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which has not levelled any accusations against the individuals and entities whose names are included on the annexed list. The co-sponsors of the draft resolution have also not provided any evidence whatsoever of that culpability, nor have they deferred to any sanctions committee, which, according to the very same draft resolution, ought to be established to verify such serious accusations. Such actions run counter to the basic notions of transparency concerning information and its sources, on the basis of which names have been included on the annexed list.

We have also noted that the draft resolution conflates two notions that very clearly are different. We understand, however, as we all support the imposition of sanctions against those who have been established to be implicated in the heinous crime of using chemical weapons. Nevertheless, the draft resolution went far beyond by imposing the same sanctions on a matter that is perceived by many as being very technical: the relationship between the Government of Syria and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the assessment of the credibility of the preliminary Syrian declaration on its chemical-weapon programme.

Over the past couple of months, we have repeatedly explained our viewpoint regarding the imbalance in the draft resolution that supposedly seeks to establish justice, particularly as it relates to the lack of evidence. Despite our repeated readiness to support Council sanctions on those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, through the standard procedures we have identified, in the interest of ensuring full justice, we were surprised to see an incomprehensible insistence on proceeding with the draft resolution without any modifications to address such imbalances. That is why we were compelled to abstain in the voting on the draft resolution today — in order to express that we support the notion of justice and accountability in general but, at the same time, oppose the levelling of arbitrary accusations against specific individuals and entities on issues that could amount to being war crimes.

In conclusion, allow me to express our regret that the proposed draft resolution gives the perception that the Security Council is divided when it comes to the danger of chemical weapons in Syria. That particular subject has always enjoyed consensus in the Council since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), on the Syrian chemical-weapon programme. I would also note our surprise that we must take such a step, but all members know that the draft resolution is doomed to fail. Such failure could negatively impact the momentum in the political process and the prospects for achieving justice and accountability in Syria in the future.

We therefore call on all the members of the Council to get back to work as soon as possible in order to restore mutual trust among members in order to support the political process in Syria and avoid any indifference and political convenience, which do not always convey the real situation in Syria and will lead only to negative consequences in that country. We also call on the international community to give due importance to the establishment of a region free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East by following a comprehensive approach, and to engage actively in addressing the risk of non-State actors using and manufacturing such weapons, and sharing that knowledge with one another.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): At the outset, let me make it very clear that we have a firm and uncompromising policy against the use of chemical weapons, born of our own experience. We have no reason for laxity on that issue. We believe that the use of chemical weapons, for any reason and under any circumstances by any party, is not only abhorrent but also violates international law. That is why we condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as reported by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We believe that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, whether State or non-State actors, whether individuals or entities, should be identified based on conclusive findings and must be held accountable. That is why we attach great importance to the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Since we joined the Security Council, we have been carefully examining the draft resolution (S/2017/172) on the use of chemical weapons in Syria with a great sense of responsibility. In that connection, we have been very frank and open in raising questions on the third and fourth reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/2016/738/Rev.1 and S/2016/888), which the draft resolution used as a basis for proposing a sanctions regime. We came to realize that, due to a number of constraints, the Joint Investigative Mechanism could not find "highly convincing evidence", "substantial evidence" or even "sufficient evidence". As the Joint Investigative Mechanism made clear in its report, what it was able to find was only "sufficient information" — and I want to underline that. Of course, we understand the JIM's real constraints. It was not under ideal circumstances that it was called upon to undertake that onerous task.

Therefore, when we affirm that its current conclusions are not yet firm enough to make the kind of decision proposed, it is not intended to cast aspersions on the work done by the JIM, which, in our judgment, was carried out with objectivity and a high level of professional responsibility. We nonetheless believe that we have the obligation to point out areas that are in need of further clarification and investigation to determine the specific individuals and entities responsible for those acts. That is to say that we are only stressing that making a decision on a very vital matter, such that which had been proposed attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons, should have been based on convincing and robust evidence. Whoever is responsible for such abhorrent acts must be explicitly identified and accordingly punished. That requires establishing clear and unambiguous evidence. Thus far, the JIM has not come up with a specific and detailed list of persons or entities that fully corresponds to the annex of the draft resolution.

In resolution 2319 (2016), the Council renewed the mandate of the JIM for one additional year. As we heard just this past Friday from the Head of JIM, Ms. Virginia Gamba, a new investigative team with better skills has been formed and is ready "to examine additional information and evidence that was not obtained or prepared by the Fact-Finding Mission". It would have been only appropriate and logical to allow the JIM to continue its work and come up with an unambiguous conclusion. That, we thought, would have contributed to ensuring the unity of the Council, which is critical with regard to very weighty issues such as the one at hand.

I should say parenthetically that one of the most successful arms control agreements was concluded in September 2013 with the aim of removing or destroying Syria's chemical weapons. By comparison, we feel that it would have been much easier to move together this time around. Nevertheless, we remain fully confident with regard to the work of the JIM. We understand that it has not received the necessary support commensurate with the unprecedented responsibility given to it by the Council. We believe that, as it resumes its important work, it is absolutely important to provide all the necessary support to the JIM and protect its professional independence. It is also vital that we use the important work of the JIM and the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission

in the Syrian Arab Republic to address the proliferation of chemical weapons in Syria, the magnitude of which experts tell us is indeed downright scary, with the potential to affect and endanger the wider region. Criminal groups are having a field day in that regard. We need to get our act together before it is too late, as happens on too many occasions.

Finally, the Syrian people have been going through unspeakable suffering and pain over the past six years. I should like to therefore conclude by once again expressing our support for ongoing Syria peace talks in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations, which, we believe, should be the most important focus of the Council to end the suffering of the Syrian people.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan has always opposed the use of chemical weapons, as well as any other kind of weapon of mass destruction. In that regard, we consider the facts pertaining to the use of chemical weapons in Syria to indicate a flagrant and inhuman act that cannot be justified. Given the extreme importance of the complete and immediate cessation of the use of chemical weapons and bringing the perpetrators to justice, we stand for the unanimous adoption of measures that would truly lead us to the cessation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the ultimate goal of ending the bloodshed. Today's meeting, however, shows the inability of the Security Council to adopt a coherent and mutually acceptable solution on this important issue, which will prolong the suffering of the Syrian people and is not conducive to resolving the crisis in that long-suffering nation.

The issue requires a coherent, balanced and meaningful approach. We believe that we cannot place responsibility on only one side of the conflict for the use of chemical weapons and that it is fundamentally important to make concrete punitive decisions only on the basis of strong, clear and irrefutable evidence with clear facts and complete conclusions. It is therefore necessary to continue the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, and we fully support it.

Finally, given the aforementioned and the fact that the lack of consensus on the draft resolution exacerbates the situation in Syria and is not conducive to strengthening the Security Council's efforts in the pursuit of peace and security, my delegation abstained in the voting.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Until today, the Security Council had stood united in its demand on all parties to refrain from the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Council has consistently confirmed that the use and proliferation of such weapons of mass destruction constitute a threat to international peace and security. With the adoption of resolution 2209 (2015), the Council committed itself to holding those responsible for any use of chemicals as weapons in Syria, including chlorine and other toxic chemicals, to account. The Council has thus far failed to deliver on that commitment and respond to the conclusions the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

The conclusive findings of the JIM are clear. The Syrian Armed Forces have used chemical weapons on at least three occasions, and the terrorist group Da'esh has used mustard gas at least once. The Council cannot remain passive in the face of confirmed non-compliance with its own numerous resolutions and the first confirmed case of non-compliance by a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. To demand accountability is not politicization but our common responsibility. That the Council was not able to honour its commitments owing to the use of the right to veto of two of its permanent members is indeed deplorable.

Sweden condemns in the strongest terms all use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere and will continue to do so. We trust that the Council will be able to once again show a united front against such international crimes. The Council's work to ensure accountability for chemical weapons used in Syria does not stop here. We strongly support the JIM's continued efforts to reach independent and technically underpinned conclusions with regard to the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in Syria.

Sweden will be making a voluntary contribution of approximately $220,000 in response to the appeal of the fifth JIM report (see S/2017/131), and we look forward to future JIM reports. We will continue to work with all members towards helping the Council to assume its responsibility again. We owe that to all of those who have suffered the inhumane consequences of toxic chemicals used as weapons. It must be clear that there will be no impunity for those crimes.

In conclusion, over the past six years the Council has been divided on too many occasions on how to end to the conflict and the needless human suffering in

Syria. We fully support the ongoing United Nations-led talks in Geneva. A renewed process geared towards lasting peace in Syria is our joint responsibility.

Mr. Seck (Senegal): (*spoke in French*): Senegal would like to take its turn in recalling that nothing can or must be used to justify something as horrific as the use of chemicals as weapons, including during conflicts and against civilians who undergo unspeakable suffering as a consequence.

The draft resolution that was voted on today (S/2017/172) begins by recalling the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. It also recalls the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). And I wish to stress the words "stockpiling" and "use".

In 2013, when Senegal was not yet a member, the Council, by resolution 2118 (2013), welcomed the decision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to send a fact-finding mission to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Two years later in 2015, at which time Senegal was still not yet a member of the Council, the latter, by resolution 2235 (2015), created the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which built on the work of the Fact-Finding Mission to, among other objectives, identify the persons, entities or groups that had perpetrated, organized, ordered or in some way participated in the use as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic of such substances as chlorine gas or other toxic chemicals.

These are the reasons why Senegal, which remains faithful to its position of principle and is a party to the CWC, voted in favour of the draft resolution that was submitted today. Having said that, given the three votes against, the three abstentions and the nine votes in favour, the Council can only accept that the draft resolution did not enjoy consensus. Therefore, after the encouraging dialogue in Astana, it is essential during the talks in Geneva that the Council support the JIM, in which we have placed our renewed trust. Those who used chemical weapons — and they were indeed used — must be brought to account. The Council must show unity to ensure that justice is done and in order to finally resolve the ongoing Syrian crisis, which has gone on for far too long.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France deeply regrets the inability of the Security Council to adopt draft resolution S/2017/172 in spite of the support of the majority of members. The draft resolution was subject to far-reaching discussions in good faith with our partners. Thanks to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), we had enough information to take the necessary measures. We had everything necessary to shoulder our responsibility, to which we were unanimously committed. We are therefore disappointed by the voting, of course, but certainly not discouraged. We do not have the right to be discouraged. We do not have the right to turn our backs and give up. We do not have the right to resign ourselves to the unthinkable — accepting the use of weapons of mass destruction without reacting with the necessary firmness.

That is why France, as underscored by Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Marc Ayrault, will not give up. The work of the JIM will continue. Other cases will be transferred to it and we will once again be required to take a position. Sooner or later, the perpetrators will be held to account. My country will remain fully mobilized with its partners. France is therefore more determined than ever to break the stalemate by drawing upon all appropriate international institutions to ensure these crimes are punished. I hope that when the time comes we will be able to come together. Our most fundamental values, as is our security and that of our children, are at stake. And all these things are simply far too important.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ukraine.

We are disappointed by the results of the voting on the draft resolution on chemical weapons use in Syria (S/2017/172). Ukraine co-sponsored and voted in favour of the draft resolution and, in that regard, I wish to reiterate some elements of our position on the subject.

Against the background of increasing challenges and threats to international peace and security, Ukraine advocates strict adherence to the provisions of key international instruments in this field, including the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) and the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The use of chemical weapons in Syria, confirmed in the reports of the Organization for the

Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, is a blatant violation of international law, and all responsible for such crimes should be brought to justice.

Ukraine therefore supports the introduction of further restrictive measures by the Council, under the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in response to the violation of the CWC and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). The inability of the Council to address breaches of the Convention will lead to further impunity and is a matter of grave concern to my delegation.

Despite the results of the voting, I commend the efforts of those delegations involved in the preparation of the draft resolution, which sought to impose new, targeted, sectoral sanctions against the Syrian regime for the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, and to redouble international efforts to prevent the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant from using chemical weapons in future. The ongoing firm stance of those delegations in defending and restoring respect for international law is indispensable and will not be in vain. Let us remain mobilized. The time for justice will come.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to express our most heartfelt condolences on the passing of Mr. Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, a friendly State. We will always remember him and his positive spirit and wisdom, which we feel in every room of the Organization. May he rest in peace.

We are not at all surprised to see that the triangle, composed of the United Kingdom, the United States and France, continues to pursue the same politicized and dangerous practices within the Security Council in order to undermine the Government of my country and subject us and our allies to the worst forms of blackmail. They are ready to put to the vote draft resolutions that draw from unprofessional reports that are unable to come to definitive conclusions and that draw on the false, fabricated eyewitness accounts of members of terrorist groups that are supported by those very same countries.

We know that the majority of these terrorists reside in Turkey, the first country to support terrorism in Syria. It is no secret that draft resolution S/2017/172 is based on reports written under unprecedented pressure. It is our impression that the missions that draft such reports do so before having even begun their work.

The Syrian Arab Republic's position remains unchanged with respect to chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction. We are against the use of such weapons; they are unacceptable and deeply unethical. That is why my country acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention, with a view to making the Middle East a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction.

However, despite all of our efforts, it is clear today that the three States concerned proposed the draft resolution (S/2017/172) simply so as to protect Israel's nuclear, chemical and biological stockpiles. My country's Government has on numerous occasions warned about the threat posed by the use by armed terrorists of such chemical weapons against civilians, in particular groups affiliated with Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaida. We have addressed 87 letters to the Security Council, I repeat, 87 letters. We have also communicated with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) and with the highest disarmament authorities, as well as the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We also contacted the Counter-Terrorism Committee and provided corroborated information regarding the use, with the support of certain Governments, of toxic chemical substances by terrorist armed groups against civilians.

Unfortunately, these issues were not discussed or even considered. We know that there were intentional attempts to ignore our efforts, and that some of these chemical substances have been burned on board vessels, in particular United Kingdom and United States ones.

Now, what are we to do given the insistence of those three countries on putting the draft resolution to the vote? Our Government has repeatedly denied having using such chemical weapons, in particular chlorine. Our Government has tried to be as transparent as possible and has cooperated fully with all of the commissions and international missions that have come to us since 2014. We have facilitated their work so as to ensure that they could successfully conduct credible investigations. What we saw is that terrorist groups

have fabricated certain so-called testimony regarding the use of such chemical weapons.

My country deplores the fact that some Council members are trying to use for political ends the reports of various United Nations mechanisms. No logical or scientific consideration has been given to these reports, which should be read on the basis of the strictest criteria, including legal and scientific criteria. We have seen that the Joint Investigative Mechanism itself is not complying with the tools and methods of work that had been set out for it since the very beginning. There is no specific, precise or objective proof regarding the use of chlorine in particular. We can see, therefore, that the Mechanism has worked in a deplorable manner and lacks professionalism, and that it has failed to comply with the strictest criteria laid down by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Here I would cite a few examples. In some of the Mechanism's reports, it is stated that the Mechanism will draw upon credible, corroborated evidence. It is supposed to specify in each case when the weapons were used, the date, the time, the climate, the temperature, the type of weapon used, the nature of the damage incurred and the ensuing medical impact. However, the mechanism drew upon eyewitness accounts that lack all of these elements. We also note that some of the evidence was moved to one location to another by armed terrorist groups and that the Mechanism was unable to analyse these practices, which are of course aimed at manipulating the readers of such reports and masking the truth.

Allow me, therefore, to put a very simple question to the Council and to ask it to respond transparently. The question, obviously, is not being posed to the representatives of France, the United Kingdom or the United States, because these States have chosen to obscure reality and to further certain agendas. My question is the following: what is the point of using chemical weapons against a limited number of armed persons when conventional weapons could have achieved the same results without needing to resort to chemical weapons? Why did we not use chemical weapons when terrorist groups attacked airports, large cities or military bases in numerous areas of Syria? My answer is very simple. Syria would never have used such weapons; it does not believe in such weapons as they are simply unethical.

The three States concerned attempted to submit the draft resolution to the Security Council, although it runs counter to all ethical principles. They are not interested in Syria or in the suffering of the Syrian people. Instead of supporting and endorsing the political process that is under way today in Geneva, they prefer to erect all possible obstacles in the way of a political solution to the conflict.

My country's Government denies all of the accusations made in the reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We remain committed to all of our obligations, including those stemming from the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Finally, on behalf of my country, I would like to thank the friendly delegations that voted against the draft resolution, the Russian Federation, China and Bolivia, as well as the States that abstained, that is, Egypt, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan. I thank all of those States for upholding international law and the principles of the United Nations, because they know that all of this can undermine the credibility of our international efforts and threaten international peace and security by compounding the suffering of our peoples.

The President: Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of February, I should like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Ukraine to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives and their respective staff, as well as the secretariat of the Council for all the support that they have given to us.

It has been a busy month indeed and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all relevant Conference Services officers and interpreters.

As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of the United Kingdom good luck in the month of March.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7894

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7894th meeting

Thursday, 9 March 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

Security Council mission

Briefing by the Security Council mission to the Lake Chad basin region (2 to 7 March 2017)

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17-06228 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: As this is the first formal meeting of the Council for the month of March, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on our collective behalf, to Volodymyr Yelchenko and his excellent team for their service in the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I speak for all of us, I am sure, in expressing our deep appreciation to Volodymyr and his delegation for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to the Lake Chad basin region (2 to 7 March 2017)

The President: On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I should like to pay a particularly warm welcome to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, who is taking part in our formal meeting today for the first time in her new capacity. She is very, very welcome.

Also, as this is the first public meeting of our presidency, I should like to remind Council members and briefers that we will be using the red flashing light system to encourage all speakers to keep to time. When the light flashes, that is a sign to stop, not an encouragement to keep going. For all Member States, the light will begin to flash after five minutes, and for today's briefers, the light will flash after 10 minutes. For each meeting, we intend that the total amount of briefing time should not exceed 30 minutes.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by the three co-leads of the Security Council mission to the countries of the Lake Chad basin — Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria — namely, France, Senegal and the United Kingdom. The Deputy Secretary-General will then brief us on the actions that the United Nations is taking to address the security, humanitarian and development crises in the region.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom on the Council's visit.

As co-lead for the Council's visit to the Lake Chad basin, I would like to focus my remarks this morning on the security situation, and my colleagues the other co-leads will tackle the other two big themes of our visit, which is the humanitarian and the longer-term development and root causes. But before I do so, I would like to thank, on behalf of all of us, the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, as well as the United Nations, for having made this visit possible. I wish also to thank all Council members for making the most of the visit and an ambitious programme and for keeping up with it.

If I had been talking to the Council about security in the Lake Chad basin a week ago, I would have spoken about the statistics — the numbers: 20,000 people killed and 2.3 million currently displaced. What I could not have done was tell Council members their stories, the lives behind these numbers, the human cost of the fragile security situation.

Last Friday, in Maroua, in northern Cameroon, with my colleagues, I saw that cost in the eyes of a 15-year-old boy whose village had been attacked by Boko Haram. He hid for days before being interrogated and imprisoned by the authorities for two years on suspicion of being a member of Boko Haram. Most of his friends had already been killed. I saw that cost in the eyes of a woman crying with her baby in her arms. I saw it in others who spoke of the murder of their husbands or sons, the kidnapping of their daughters, the burning of their homes. We heard from civil society how women were selling their bodies for sex just to eat.

All these people brought home the horrifying consequences of the chaos and insecurity wrought by Boko Haram. I hope that together we brought some much-needed focus to the suffering, which been neglected for too long.

But amid the horror, we also heard of the bravery and commitment of the people of the region as they try to bring stability and security back to the Lake Chad basin. We heard chapters from a success story on its way to completion, and stories from the Multinational Joint Task Force of liberating 20,000 hostages and successfully winning back territory that will act as future homes for the people of the region. But the story is not over. Security is not yet entrenched; it is fragile in too

many places. Force commanders and generals outlined continued attacks. Suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices are still far too common. And Boko Haram's tactics are getting more barbaric — mothers turned into suicide bombers with infants strapped to them in addition to their bombs. Boko Haram are down but not out, but make no mistake — their cruelty knows no bounds.

It was clear that international support remains vital to this fight. We visited Operation Barkhane headquarters in D'Jamena, where we met French troops and were joined by members of the British and American military. Together, they are supporting the Multinational Joint Task Force, as well as the Nigerian military, through capacity-building, training and intelligence-sharing. We heard how further support was needed to enable better mobility and logistics in the fight.

Women's participation and protection were a constant theme throughout the visit, and it was clear that women must be more involved in efforts to tackle Boko Haram, counter violent extremism and build peace. We also heard of the hundreds of Boko Haram defectors, including women and children. We made clear the need for compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law by all actors in tackling the scourge of Boko Haram. That is essential to preventing mistreatment, including of detainees, as well as to building confidence among communities and counter radicalization.

Let me close with this final reflection. Only yesterday, here in New York, I met three inspirational young women from Chibok who were attending an International Women's Day event at the United Nations. Far from being victims and far from being survivors, those women are now campaigners for education for women and girls in poverty. Despite everything they had endured and despite being caught up in the hell unleashed by Boko Haram, they are determined to look to the future. They showed what lies ahead. They showed a future that may be possible when the fighting ends. To achieve that reality, it is clear that there can be no military solution; only a comprehensive approach will bring stability and peace. And so let me reiterate that the United Kingdom will stand side by side with the region, with the four Governments that we visited and with the affected people in this effort.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Senegal to focus on the root causes and longer-term development.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the delegation of Senegal, I should like at the outset to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on the United Kingdom's assumption to the presidency of the Council for this month. You may rest assured of our support and full cooperation.

We also deeply thank the Governments and the peoples of the four countries that we visited: Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria.

I congratulate Ms. Amina Mohammed and wish her every success in her new functions as Deputy Secretary-General, which she assumed in March, including at yesterday's commemoration of International Women's Day.

I welcome this meeting to discuss the Security Council's historic visit from 2 to 7 March to the Lake Chad region, with successive stops in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. As you rightly said, Mr. President, the visit was not only timely but also essential, given the extent to which the multidimensional crisis affecting that strategic part of the African continent has been neglected and even forgotten, as we attempt to redress today. As you, Sir, addressed the security dimension and Ambassador Delattre will address the human dimension, I shall focus on the part of our visit that was my purview — the deep-rooted causes of the crisis and long-term solutions.

All with whom we met from the Governments and the populace — including technical and financial partners, humanitarian actors and civil society representatives, pointed to the lack of education, training, sustainable development and resilience to the combined effects of climate change and global warming, which lie at the heart of the crisis we all wish to see resolved. There has also been a population explosion in the context of deteriorating environmental conditions and endemic poverty and unemployment. These factors complicate efforts to exploit the demographic transition that would make optimal use of the demographic dividend. Moreover, the countries of the region are suffering cruelly from the economic and financial effects of the fall in commodity prices, including that of oil, on which those countries' budgets rely heavily. When we add to that the pernicious effects of cross-border crime; the traffic in drugs, arms, human beings and cultural goods; the growing number of clandestine migratory

flows and cybercrime, we can assess the full scope of the challenges to that key region of the Sahelo-Saharan region.

What, then, are the region's long-term prospects? Throughout our visit, we affirmed the need to focus on everything from humanitarian issues to development. We need significant coordination at various levels between United Nations organs, specialized agencies, financial and technical partners, as well as subregional coordination within the States members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and intergovernmental coordination at the national level, with contributions from the private sector and civil society. We look forward with interest to the contributions to be made by the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General with respect to coordination in that area.

The Security Council should strengthen its exchnages with the other organs, in particular the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Our work with the Secretary-General is proceeding apace, although the available funding is drying up at the regional and international levels and remains dramatically insufficient to meet needs in all sectors. The small amount that has been announced and included in the budget is being spent effectively, but Governments, the humanitarian agencies and civil society organizations often appeal to the same donors. It is therefore important to identify and mobilize other sources of international financing, and above all domestic funding, by increasing contributions from the private sector, foundations and charitable organizations.

A platform to manage it all must be established, taking the priorities of Governments into account, particularly when they have prepared their own development programmes pursuant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union Agenda 2063, and the economic agendas of the regional economic communities to which the countries belong — the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for the Niger and Nigeria, and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) for Cameroon and Chad.

In the security sector, the Security Council must strongly encourage and support the countries of the Lake Chad basin and their neighbours in their outstanding, high-profile efforts to combat terrorism in West and Central Africa. The Governments and the peoples of those countries have moved quickly to pool their resources to more effectively fight terrorists and organized crime. The establishment and operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force are a striking example of such cooperation and is extremely important to the world mobilization against that international scourge. These countries have a right to and fully deserve the decisive support of the international community, beginning with the Security Council.

A question was put to us during our visit as to why the Security Council takes so long to adopt resolutions that would help those countries. I have no easy answer to that question, but one banker even suggested that security, in its broadest understanding, should henceforth be considered to be a world public good. Countries, such as those of the Lake Chad basin, that contribute to the critical stability and security of the region therefore have the right to enjoy the benefits in terms of financial, logistical, and technical support, as well as in equipment and training adapted to highly asymmetric threats. We must also recall that two members of the Multinational Joint Task Force, Chad and the Niger, also belong to the Group of Five Sahel, which is another important subregional initiative to fight terrorist organizations operating in North and East Africa, particularly in Libya and northern Mali.

The Security Council should also fully utilize the conclusions of the joint visit in February by the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa to the four countries of the Lake Chad basin, including the recommendations on strengthening judicial and police cooperation capacities, especially mutual legal instruments on assistance in the areas of prisoner extradition and transfer. It is also an issue of adopting a common strategy to properly address the matter of persons who have repented and turned themselves into the authorities, one that duly includes norms of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. That would also contribute to efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate women, children and youth, as the President just mentioned.

At our meeting at the Abuja headquartes of ECOWAS, which included officials of that organization and the Secretary-General of ECCAS, we received a briefing on the draft comprehensive strategy developed

jointly by those two organizations, which is aligned with the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. An interregional ECOWAS/ECCAS summit is being prepared for the adoption of the draft strategy, which will include neighbouring countries from the Lake Chad basin, namely, Nigeria and Cameroon. As part of the analysis, it is important to include the maritime aspect of the counter-terrorism fight, as well as efforts to combat crime.

In conclusion, I should like to underscore that all of those efforts will be for naught unless Lake Chad is saved by raising the water level, either through plentiful rainfall in the long term or, as was explained to us, by diverting water from elsewhere. That can be done, as we say in Senegal, by way of hydro-diplomacy, namely, inter-State cooperation in order to fairly and jointly manage trans-border water resources, just as has been done for more than 40 years by Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal in the framework of the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River, and as done by the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal through the Gambia River Basin Development Organization.

Lastly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has carried out a study on joint efforts with regard to Lake Chad, which I found very useful, entitled *The Future Is An Ancient Lake*. The report points out that many traditional practices in the Lake Chad basin could be useful in overcoming the challenges faced by the region owing to natural effects as well as human activity, including intensive agriculture. The reports refers to the importance of such practices as a good foundation upon which to develop a new ways of undertaking agriculture, grazing and sustainable fishing, all in the framework of a new ecosystem approach aimed at the integrated conservation of land, water and living resources, thereby ensuring equitable use and preservation. That is precisely what is called for in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Researchers have shown us how stakeholders in the Lake Chad basin — using traditional knowledge, biodiversity and the genetic resources of their land — could use new technologies in order to feed themselves, transform production and create added value; in a word, how to develop while safeguarding their ecosystem. The great hope aroused by our visit, both among the populations and the Governments, can therefore become a reality.

The President: I thank the representative of Senegal for his briefing and for his co-leadership of the visit.

I now give the floor to the representative of France, who will inform us about the humanitarian situation.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to welcome the presence here today of the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, whose return to New York to take up her important duties is both a great opportunity for the United Nations and excellent news for us all. I should also like warmly to congratulate the United Kingdom on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council, as well as to assure it of our full support.

It was an honour and an unrivalled experience to lead this important Security Council visit to the Lake Chad region, along with you, Sir, and our colleague and friend from Senegal. I join you, Mr. President, in expressing thanks to all of the officials who welcomed us so warmly, including the entire United Nations team. In line with the distribution of issues we agreed, I will focus on the humanitarian situation.

On behalf of my colleagues, I should like to begin by paying tribute to the courage and commitment of the humanitarians we met, who are doing outstanding work in often very difficult situations. The daily commitment of those men and women is exemplary, and it is important that the Council visited them on the ground in order to express our deep gratitude.

The United Nations has considerably increased its presence on the ground, particularly in north-east Nigeria, to face the humanitarian crisis that threatens hundreds of thousands of people. We were able to visit the hub at Maiduguri, in north-east Nigeria, which brings together all humanitarian actors and is now operational. Those efforts must be pursued, while the United Nations must further strengthen its presence in order to meet the immense and growing needs of the most vulnerable populations. With regard to the humanitarian situation, we have identified three main issues: the humanitarian emergency, protection for affected populations and the challenge of financing humanitarian aid.

On the first challenge — the humanitarian emergency and access to populations in need — the humanitarian consequences of the crisis are catastrophic for the region: 26 million people affected, of whom

10.7 million are in need of emergency aid. More than two and a half million people have been forced to take to the road to flee or go into exile. Land is no longer cultivated, markets are at a standstill and the prices of basic necessities have soared.

Food security was the first urgent need highlighted by our interlocutors on the ground. The situation is tragic and threatens hundreds of thousands of people in the region. In total, more than 7 million people are affected. The Secretary-General has spoken of famine in the north-east of Nigeria. The Security Council was able to meet with displaced persons and refugees in Cameroon and Nigeria. All of them expressed the same concerns: problems of safety and access to water and quality food. The inhabitants are sometimes deprived of their means of subsistence and depend entirely upon humanitarian aid for their survival.

Insecurity and access difficulties sometimes complicate food distribution. It is therefore crucial that the countries of the region ensure unhindered access, without bureaucratic impediments, as well as secure access for the United Nations and humanitarian actors wherever populations need emergency assistance. To be truly effective, the efforts of the United Nations must be only in support of those of the Governments concerned. During its visit, the Council welcomed the excellent cooperation between the United Nations and the countries of the region. In north-east Nigeria, given the scale of the needs, we encouraged the Nigerian Government to continue its efforts to facilitate humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable people.

Health is the second emergency. With, for instance, 60 per cent of health-care facilities destroyed in north-east Nigeria, people are threatened by large-scale epidemics, such as polio or measles.

The third emergency is education. More than 1,200 schools have been destroyed since the beginning of the crisis, and 3.2 million children are urgently in need of education. Education for girls is paramount and should be encouraged. There is no time to be wasted in preventing this generation from being sacrificed.

In addition to the humanitarian emergency, the second challenge is that of ensuring the protection of civilians and respect for human rights. The goal is to ensure that people are kept safe from Boko Haram and to assist with the voluntary and sustainable return of displaced persons or refugees, where the security situation allows. The Council also recalled the importance of respecting humanitarian law and, to that end, welcomes the tripartite agreement signed by Nigeria, Cameroon and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 2 March in Yaoundé. The agreement allows for the creation of a solid legal framework to encourage the voluntary and sustainable return of Nigerian refugees to safe areas, under the auspices of the UNHCR. The Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria have committed to implementing that agreement as soon as possible.

The Security Council has also paid special attention to the plight of women and girls in the region. In Maroua, Cameroon, the Council heard stories of the pain inflicted on female refugees and internally displaced persons by Boko Haram. I think that, for all of us, it was a particularly powerful and touching encounter. In Chad and Nigeria, we also met with a number of civil society women's organizations for those displaced in the Maiduguri camp and women Senate representatives in Abuja. We lauded the courage shown by women and girls who are often victims of both Boko Haram violence and of stigmatization within their own communities. It is therefore crucial for those women not only to be protected from prostitution and early marriage, but also to be included in security management, political decision-making and economic development matters. It is a key point that struck us all, which I would like to underscore today.

The third challenge is that of providing financial support to affected areas. The response to the immense needs that I mentioned has remained inadequate. We welcomed Nigeria's commitment to allot $1 million to the north-east of the country in response to the humanitarian emergency. It is important for that financial commitment to lead to action as soon as possible. We have also noted that the international community's has rallied in support of the Government of Nigeria by building on the outcome of the Oslo Conference, which was held just prior to our mission and was a step in the right direction. Fourteen countries pledged $672 million in humanitarian aid over the next three years and $457 million for 2017. We have also underscored the need for the international community and Governments in the region to continue their efforts. By way of example, it is in that spirit that a donors' conference for Chad will be held this spring in Paris, under the auspices of the World Bank.

Given the magnitude of the needs, we underscored that it was important to promote a global and regional

approach to creating synergies and enhancing coordination with other donors and to mobilize goodwill, including private donors and companies, as well as other non-traditional donors such as emerging countries. Beyond that, our interviews revealed how important it is for humanitarian aid from partners to be equitably distributed among the four countries concerned and for it to be properly apportioned within each country according to emergency needs.

As underscored during the Oslo Conference, our interlocutors also recalled the importance of the humanitarian continuum, stabilization and development. Above and beyond financing for emergency humanitarian aid, as our friend Ambassador Seck pointed out, it is essential to secure long-term financing to prevent the perpetuation of the crisis. To put things in a broader perspective, I would say that, based on information on the situation on the ground, which is always the most important type, the mission was crucial for validating, and if necessary, rectifying some of the strategic guidelines that we implement here in New York.

For my part, I would like to briefly highlight three main lessons learned. The first is that the mission was crucial in itself, not only to shed light on the Lake Chad basin region, but also to make it a long-term priority for the international community. Frankly, the Lake Chad basin region has not always received the attention it deserves from the international community. This mission will help to correct that mistake and injustice. Secondly, this mission proved that, given the multifaceted humanitarian, security and economic crisis that affects the region, the only response possible is a global approach that encompasses all three key priorities: stepping up a coordinated response to Boko Haram, responding to the humanitarian emergency and setting in motion the virtuous circle of development. All of our representatives agree and feedback has clearly shown that to be successful in overcoming those three challenges, they must be tackled head-on and simultaneously.

How can we vanquish terrorism without eradicating abject poverty and malnutrition? How can we achieve that without improving education and youth employment? Conversely, how can we spur development without putting an end to Boko Haram? We can see that they are all interlinked and that compartmentalizing the situation would mean resigning ourselves to doing nothing. The only way to overcome those three challenges is to address their root causes. Once again, it is one thing to understand concepts while here in New York, but quite another to internalize them as we hear from our interlocutors on the ground.

The third lesson — and allow me to stress this — is that our efforts in the Lake Chad region can and must be an example of United Nations reform. This mission confirmed that the silo mentality, which has long been the key component of United Nations bureaucracy, does not produce results and that an integrated approach that smartly combines the entire range of tools available can be successful. The Security Council's mission strengthens a vision held by António Guterres and Amina Mohamed for United Nations reform that France fully supports.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his briefing.

I give the floor for the very first time to the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I would like to thank the members of the Security Council for the warm welcome that I have had today; it is truly humbling. I would also like to congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Security Council in March.

As Deputy Secretary-General, as an African and as a Nigerian, I truly welcome the Council's visit to the Lake Chad basin to witness first-hand the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency — even more so because, as a child, I grew up in Maiduguri and know that terrorists are not born, but created by a set of circumstances.

Security Council field visits around the world have been instrumental in highlighting the links between peace, development and human rights, and that has been recognized in the remarks made this morning. I thank the Council for the much-needed attention now brought to that troubled region. The Lake Chad crisis provides a powerful illustration of the complex multidimensional challenges facing our modern world. A successful response requires mobilizing our assets holistically to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations is focused on six main pillars of engagement: political; humanitarian assistance; human rights; recovery and development; justice, law enforcement and the financing of terrorism; and

technical support to the regional Multinational Joint Task Force. Three other dimensions are being added: gender; defections and arrests of Boko Haram militants, with its own challenges given the number of youth and girls; and support to Member States in developing a regional plan of action to prevent violent extremism.

It is essential that we address the Boko Haram crisis in a holistic manner. That means looking beyond the security lens and addressing root causes, including inequality, exclusion and the full array of economic, social, political, cultural and religious grievances. To that end, the United Nations continues — through the efforts of Mr. Fall and Mr Chambas, the Secretary-General's Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, respectively — to encourage Member States and the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States to convene a joint summit on Boko Haram.

We and the Council are keenly aware of the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation, which has displaced millions of people in the region. Approximately 10.7 million people in the Lake Chad basin need humanitarian assistance now. More than 7 million require food support, including 515,000 children with severe acute malnutrition. Drought is inevitable and there is a real risk of famine, which can be averted with the urgent action that we need now.

The World Food Programme is reaching more than 1 million people in north-east Nigeria and is expanding its efforts. UNICEF has assisted 4 million people with basic health care and safe water. But, despite the considerable contribution of the recent Oslo donor conference, demand outstrips the resources. I urge Member States to ensure that the $1.5 billion humanitarian appeal for the Lake Chad region is fully funded, and I implore affected Governments to ensure full, safe and unimpeded access to all affected areas and populations.

At the same time, we must pay attention to the need to better coordinate our responses and ensure that resources are used in the most efficient manner possible. We must also close the gap between humanitarian assistance and development interventions. Lasting recovery will entail supporting the reconstruction of schools and health centres and reviving essential infrastructure, such as agriculture and water supplies, that supports the necessary livelihoods.

Effective prevention of future radicalization and violence will also entail comprehensive responses that benefit all members of society, especially marginalized communities and youth. I was in Bama just three weeks ago, where we have one of the largest camps, and to see how children were thriving with the opportunity of education, albeit not in the right circumstances. But certainly the transition that UNICEF was able to provide was really a sign of hope, and one that we need to invest in reinforcing the recovery and the investments that are needed.

The situation in the four countries affected by Boko Haram continues to be defined by grave human rights abuses committed by Boko Haram and in the context of counter-terrorism actions. In response, the United Nations is deploying additional human rights officers to collect information on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The United Nations is also assisting affected States to ensure their counter-terrorism efforts comply fully with international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law. There is a need to strengthen justice mechanisms and ensure due process for defectors and suspected terrorists.

In the Niger and Chad, the United Nations has been able to facilitate the release of dozens of children suspected of being Boko Haram fighters and to deliver them to child protection actors. In Nigeria, the United Nations has been given access to detention facilities in Maiduguri to monitor the conditions under which women and children captured during military operations are being held. Cameroon has also indicated an interest in cooperating with the United Nations on this issue.

The plight of women and girls associated with and affected by Boko Haram is of particular concern. The United Nations and partners have provided care and support to approximately 6,000 women and children formerly associated with or captured by Boko Haram, but many more are still displaced in camps, detained by the authorities or are struggling to reintegrate into their communities, where many face stigma and discrimination. Many are survivors of sexual violation, exploitation and abuse. They need comprehensive assistance. We also need to scale up efforts to provide access to sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial support and livelihood support for female-headed households. We must ensure that women have key roles in the response — from food distribution and camp management to all efforts to

counter violent extremism and to restore State authority and build peace.

This month is about women — it is our women's month. It is fitting that the United Kingdom, which has championed the issue of women and peace and security in the Council for many years, holds the Council presidency. But I also want to commend the Council as a whole. In the past two months, members have heard from the female civil society leader from Nigeria, Fatima Askira of the Borno Women Development Initiative. Council experts have met with senior United Nations leaders from the region in a dedicated meeting on women and peace and security in the Lake Chad basin, and during the Council's mission this past week, members met with female legislators, civil society leaders and the internally displaced.

Addressing the root causes of this crisis is necessary for durable peace in the region. Let us note that it will also to help alleviate the phenomenon of mass migration to Europe by people who feel they have no choice but to look for better opportunities far from their homeland. The United Nations development system is working on national and cross-border initiatives to support poverty reduction, capacity development, effective governance, natural resource management, early recovery, disaster risk reduction, social cohesion, peacebuilding and resilience.

One priority must be the regeneration of Lake Chad itself. The lake and its wetlands have now lost 90 per cent of their water due to unsustainable water management practices and climate change. I commend the Lake Chad basin countries' commitment to the lake's regeneration, but the support of the international community will be essential. I would also like to acknowledge at this point the support of the Chinese Government for its work on some of the feasibility studies that have been needed to look at the possibilities and the financing of that recharge.

The Council's recent visit to Lake Chad has highlighted the urgency and complexity of the crisis faced by the region's people and the threat it poses to international peace and security. My clear message today is that the solution lies in holistic thinking. The 2030 Agenda provides a blueprint and a tool for providing a better future for the people of the Lake Chad basin. A fundamental requirement for success there and around the world is solidarity and partnership — a global partnership for sustainable development, especially in the most fragile contexts where people most need our solidarity and support for their right to a life of dignity.

To that end, I welcome the work being done by the World Bank in the Lake Chad basin, as well as in Somalia, Yemen and South Sudan. I would also like to commend the commitment of the African Union and Africa's regional organizations to peace, security and the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Africa's own Agenda 2063.

I sincerely believe that the Council's visit has boosted the potential for partnership and provided much-needed hope for the people of that region, but also the impetus for us, in the United Nations system, to gather all the assets that we have and to put them to a much more effective and efficient use for the sake of those who deserve so much more attention than we have been able to give in the recent past.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her briefing.

Traditionally in these briefings on Security Council missions it is just the co-leads who speak, but of course all Security Council members are entitled to request the floor. Several members have done so. Allow me to encourage those who have done so to be brief, given the agenda that we have ahead of us this morning.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank Ambassadors Rycroft, Seck and Delattre, as well as Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, for their briefings. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the Deputy Secretary-General and wish her every success in her new functions.

The situation in the Lake Chad basin is alarming. We are talking about approximately 10 million people who urgently need humanitarian aid. Unfortunately, this crisis does not get much traction in the media, and the international community does not know much about it.

The multidimensional nature of the humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin has a number of causes and serious consequences. As we said in the briefing on 12 January (see S/PV.7861), the situation has become what it is because of many aggravating factors, such as the grievous security situation, undermined primarily by Boko Haram's terrorist acts, and the lack of food and other basic necessities for those populations.

In order to verify the seriousness of the crisis and get a first-hand account from the most relevant actors — leaders, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, displaced persons, refugees and the military — a Security Council mission was organized to visit Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. The information we obtained was valuable, as were many of the testimonies collected, despite the fact that they described sad, even heartbreaking personal experiences.

For many years now the Lake Chad basin has been witnessing a multifaceted, structural crisis, which demands the development of activities that promote stability, mitigate the threat of terrorism and feed the population. We are well aware that this is an insecure region with very high population growth rates, and one that has suffered from the effects of climate change, poverty and low levels of social investment. It is therefore essential and urgent to ensure that the Governments of the four countries concerned implement public policies that prioritize the allocation of resources to education, health services and job creation. Only then will they be able to tackle the terrible living conditions. To make matters worse, Boko Haram has been terrorizing civilians in many communities, resulting in a flood of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees. The international community should spare no effort to provide the region with the right tools.

Uruguay considers it important to recognize the work of the specialized United Nations agencies and the donor countries that have made good on their pledges, most recently at the Oslo Conference, a topic that we went into in detail during the mission with representatives of the donor countries. We also commend the work of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the progress it has made in combating Boko Haram, in a clear example of how crucial such coordinated regional efforts are in these kinds of crises, when those who undermine stability do not recognize borders or countries and, worse still, violate the fundamental human rights of entire communities, where women and children suffer the most.

Based on this mission, in which we participated — and I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership of the Security Council — the Council has now committed to continuing to address the root causes that have produced this long-ignored crisis.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I too would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your presidency, Mr. President.

During the past week, the Security Council opened its eyes and ears to focus on the people of the Lake Chad basin. What we have seen and heard will not be easily forgotten, nor should it be. Millions of people across four countries have been displaced as a result of the brutal insurgency of Boko Haram. We heard of lives disrupted and livelihoods destroyed. Displacement has led to vulnerability, particularly for women and girls. We heard chilling stories of husbands murdered, children abducted and killed and women subjected to sexual violence. Millions more are suffering from hunger and malnutrition, and we heard that the threat of famine looms.

Yet alongside the desperation there is hope. We have seen how host communities have welcomed the displaced into their homes and villages, sharing already scarce resources, and I would like to pay special tribute to them. We commend the efforts being made by the relevant authorities to mitigate the consequences of the crisis, as well as the work of humanitarian workers and the staff of local non-governmental organizations, who are on the front lines of the response.

However, more is needed if we are to avoid a humanitarian disaster of historic proportions. To begin with, the pledges made in Oslo must be disbursed as quickly as possible. I am happy to report that Sweden has already done so, and I call on others to follow. Secondly, every effort must be made to ensure that the assistance reaches even the most remote and inaccessible areas.

It is clear that the regional nature of the Boko Haram threat requires a regional response. The countries of the region are working together, including through the Multinational Joint Task Force, which is making progress and deserves further international support. We also call for rapid deployment of the African Union civilian component of the Task Force. We must ensure that the response does not increase the suffering of an already brutalized population, and in that regard, we welcome the commitment expressed by all the Governments of the region to protecting civilians and human rights, in line with the 2016 Abuja Action Statement. Counter-terrorism measures must comply with international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. We urge the United Nations to enhance its

human rights presence on the ground in order to support monitoring and capacity-building in that regard. We encourage Governments to enhance their prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches for dealing with persons associated with Boko Haram and to improve countries' coordination in that effort. Children must always be treated as children, and handover protocols that prioritize children should be adopted.

The roots of the conflict run deeper than the Boko Haram insurgency. They include abject poverty, climate change and underdevelopment. Indeed, the situation in the Lake Chad basin is a vivid illustration of the links between security, development and human rights, as well as climate-change-related risks. In Niamey, President Issoufou of the Niger cited the shrinking of Lake Chad as a direct and major reason for the rise of Boko Haram. This is exactly the type of situation that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the sustaining peace agenda were created to respond to. Working within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, we must ensure a coordinated and better linked humanitarian, reconstruction and development response. This multidimensional crisis is an example of one to which the United Nations system can take an integrated approach, and we look forward to supporting the Deputy Secretary-General as she leads the reform of the Organization's development system so that it can better respond to such crises.

Yesterday we celebrated International Women's Day. The women we met in Maroua and Maiduguri, despite the challenges they face on a daily basis, are survivors and leaders, not victims. Meeting the visiting Security Council, they clearly told us their stories so that we would know their realities, and set out their needs so that we would know how to respond. We must not let them down. It is clear that women play a vital role in prevention, peacebuilding and de-radicalization efforts. Improving education, particularly for girls, and ending early marriage are issues that will be central to development in the region. We were encouraged by the development of national action plans on women and peace and security, and those words must now be translated into actions with adequate resources and meaningful implementation.

Now that we have seen the crisis that has been unfolding in the Lake Chad basin, we must ensure that we actively follow up on our engagement and on the trip's findings. That is why we would like to see the Council agree a presidential statement setting out a road map for the way forward that encourages the following actions, among others.

The first is for the Secretary-General to show leadership, including by visiting the region and reporting back to the Council. Secondly, the semi-annual briefings of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWAS) and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), as well as the recurring Security Council meetings under the agenda item on peace and security in Africa, should be used as forums for following up on the findings of our visit. Thirdly, we should work on developing a comprehensive regional strategy for addressing the drivers of the conflict, in line with existing plans and supported by development partners and international financial institutions. Fourthly, we should support efforts to strengthen the links between humanitarian assistance and long-term development measures, focusing on early recovery and the provision of alternative livelihoods. Fifthly, we should encourage the organization in 2018 of a third Regional Security Summit, focusing on post-conflict stabilization and on early recovery and reconstruction. Lastly, we should enhance the capacity of UNOWAS and UNOCA to jointly coordinate United Nations engagement in the region and report on progress in that regard.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Governments of Nigeria, the Niger, Chad and Cameroon, as well as the co-leaders, the United Nations Secretariat and their colleagues on the ground, for making our visit a true success.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I would like to begin by warmly welcoming the Deputy Secretary-General, with whom Italy has already worked very intensively, both as a mission and through me personally during the organization of Expo Milano 2015, and to say that we are ready to continue that collaboration. I got the feeling during our meeting in Nigeria that Ms. Mohammed's country was already missing her, while we are doing our best to keep her here.

I congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency. This is our first open meeting under your presidency, which has begun with the successful organization of this visit. I would like to express my appreciation to you, to the French and the Senegalese Ambassadors for having set up the visit, and to the whole United Nations family and the Governments of each country for their crucial assistance at every stage of the mission. We were in

favour of the idea of the mission from the start, since we knew it would offer an opportunity to deliver a strong message of support and commitment to the countries of the region and to the international community — and we have not been disappointed. The goals were achieved.

What have we learned from the visit? First of all, we directly observed the magnitude of the crisis in the field, and all of its dimensions — humanitarian, social and security — show it to be even more alarming than expected. I think the best illustration is when we were in Maroua last week, once a tourist destination on the border of Cameroon's main national park. Today, we were not even allowed to leave the airport; we were surrounded by military and they explained the situation. We saw the deep impact of the humanitarian crisis on the region. The Oslo Conference demonstrated growing international attention to Lake Chad. Many States, including Italy, committed to supporting the region. We must continue to stress the importance of timely and coordinated assistance to the region.

Turning to the issue of security, during our visit we observed the firm commitment of local Governments to the fight against Boko Haram and against terrorist activity in the regio — efforts that are shared by civil society. It is crucial for us to support those efforts and to promote the participation of civil society, in particular women's organizations, in mediation and the fight against radicalization. We continue to be concerned about the many trafficking networks operating in the region. There is no underestimating the ties between Boko Haram and transnational organized crime. In particular, we must resolutely tackle any instance of smuggling, especially human trafficking connected to that phenomenon. In that regard, I note the lucid analysis made by the President of the Niger and its Minister of the Interior of the effects of that criminal network on the crisis in the region. We are convinced that those issues ought to be addressed with a broader regional perspective that encompasses the Sahel, in line with the United Nations initiative already in place, particularly the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

But that alone is not enough to improve the security situation. The region is suffering from the socioeconomic effects of desertification. It is essential to accompany security mission with a long-term development plan in order to foster sustainability for the people of the area — in particular, internally displaced persons — and, once the security situation is stabilized, to prevent them from being exploited by traffickers and smugglers.

In closing, we need to analyse the root causes of instability in the region and how they impact the crisis. I would mention, in particular, the effect of climate change. Addressing the root causes of instability, we are convinced, is a key priority if we are to overcome the related security and humanitarian crises and ensure the long-lasting development of the region. In that regard, we feel that the region would benefit from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by fostering sustainable peace and development. During our meeting last week, Mr. President, you used the very apt expression "the neglected crisis" several times. At least the crisis is no longer neglected by the Security Council.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): We welcome the new Deputy Secretary-General. We look forward to working with her.

The stories and courage of the women, men and youths we met during our trip are indelibly etched in our minds and will continue to inspire all of us as we work to address the urgent challenges of the people of the Lake Chad basin. We were particularly interested in our Lake Chad basin trip and the United Nations approach to demobilization, reintegration and support for the ex-Boko Haram, especially with regard to the women and girls coming out of association with Boko Haram, as well as the need to ensure that any identified accountability initiatives are responsive to women and girls and include following up on any allegations of sexual and gender-based abuse. We also witnessed the extent of the United Nations regular engagement with women's civil society organizations and women's community leaders on peace and security matters.

We note that youth and women's voices and efforts are absolutely critical to re-establishing peace and security in the Lake Chad basin subregion and in creating the conditions for meaningful change, sustainable economic development and sustainable livelihoods — as noted by the Deputy Secretary-General — especially for households headed by females. Those voices and efforts are also crucial to preventing extremism and creating more inclusive societies.

We also looked at the ongoing training of security forces to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Still, the protection challenges remain significant, especially for women and children. The

leaders of the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria recognized that fact in their interactions and conversations with us. Thousands of women have been victims of abduction, sexual slavery, forced recruitment and other terrible abuses, and we were humbled in our meetings with the mention of just a few of those acts and first-hand stories.

Furthermore, some of those victims, once out of Boko Haram's clutches, face stigmatization in their communities or suffer secondary or tertiary displacement as a result of such stigma. Still, we were encouraged during our trip by reports of defections from Boko Haram and other extremist groups. That trend underscores the importance of establishing regionally coordinated disarmament, demobilization, deradicalization and reintegration programmes. Respect for human rights on the part of the military, security services and Governments of the Lake Chad basin is also key to establishing and building trust with local communities that have been impacted by the conflict. That was also a subject of conversation with the Governments and leaders, who agreed wholeheartedly with this approach on the respect for human rights.

Finally and more broadly, the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis, particularly the food insufficiency challenges and the spectre of famine, is really difficult to overstate. Enabling access for the humanitarian actors, both from the United Nations and the implementing partners, the non-governmental organizations in each of the four countries we visited will be absolutely essential to turning back famine and to improving food security, especially for vulnerable populations such as mothers and their young children. For all of us colleagues, I think the resolve and energy we have voiced here in our interventions today must be sustained if we are to make a real difference in the lives of those we met during this very important Security Council trip.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I am very encouraged, Mr. President, by your suggestion that we should be more active and action oriented. I would just like to add one very brief comment.

I participated in the mission and was very encouraged by the sense of ownership from the regional countries of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. They are very determined to deal with the Boko Haram issue, and the Presidents have very clear views on the situation, on the causes and priority tasks to address that issue. The African countries themselves are seeking solutions to their own problems. Regional groups such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Group of Five Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States are making joint efforts to tackle the crisis.

Japan believes that assistance from the international community has greater force and is more needed when the country or the people on the ground themselves make genuine efforts to solve their own problems. I have the strong sense that the Boko Haram problem and the humanitarian crisis should not be neglected. Furthermore, the countries of the region have a keen interest in this issue.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7895

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7895th meeting
Thursday, 9 March 2017, 11.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

Report of the Secretary-General on Burundi (S/2017/165)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

Report of the Secretary-General on Burundi (S/2017/165)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Burundi to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jamal Benomar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, East African Community Facilitator of the Inter-Burundi Dialogue and Former President of Tanzania; and His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, in his capacity as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Mr. Mkapa will be joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Entebbe.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/165, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Burundi.

I now give the floor to Mr. Benomar.

Mr. Benomar: I am grateful for the opportunity to present the Secretary-General's report on Burundi (S/2017/165). This is the first written report pursuant to resolution 2303 (2016), and it provides a comprehensive picture of the situation in the country. The report is very factual and those facts speak for themselves.

First of all, the human rights situation remains extremely worrying, and has in fact been worsening. During the reporting period, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced disappearances, cases of torture and ill-treatment, allegations of illegal places of detention, and restrictions on freedom of association, expression and movement. OHCHR noted an increase in allegations of enforced disappearances, with more than 210 allegations received from October 2016 to January 2017 alone. Many Burundians live in fear as a result of widespread repression and increasing intimidation by the Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth militia. Members of opposition political parties and perceived opponents reportedly continue to be victims of arbitrary arrest, detention, ill-treatment and enforced disappearance.

Secondly, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. In 2016, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance reached 3 million, or 26 per cent of the population. There has been a fourfold increase in the number of people who are food insecure. According to the World Health Organization, 8.2 million Burundians, or 75 per cent of the country, were affected by malaria in 2016. Since the beginning of the crisis, almost 390,000 Burundians have fled the country. We commend the neighbouring countries for their generosity in hosting these refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees projects that the number of refugees will reach 500,000 by the end of the year.

The third key message of the report is that the political impasse in the country continues. Nearly two years have passed since the beginning of the political crisis in Burundi, which was sparked by President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term in office. Since then, the political impasse has only deepened. Political space has been narrowed further through repression.

I commend the mediator, President Museveni, and the facilitator, former President Mkapa, for their leadership and stand firmly behind their efforts. It is disappointing that despite their dedicated engagement, there has been no significant progress in the dialogue process led by the East African Community (EAC). The latest round of talks in Arusha was boycotted by the Government. Until today, the two sides have not sat around the same table.

The United Nations will continue to provide its full support to facilitator Mkapa. In this context, the establishment of a joint technical working group marks a positive enhancement of the collaboration among the EAC, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations. Yet, no progress will be achieved without all Burundian stakeholders committing in good faith to

an inclusive dialogue process without preconditions. The full political weight of the region and international community is needed to achieve progress.

While the EAC-led dialogue has not advanced as hoped, the internal dialogue process led by the Government-established Commission Nationale de Dialogue Inter-Burundais (CNDI) is close to completion. The interim report of the CNDI reaches a number of sweeping conclusions that have the potential to undermine the Arusha Agreement, including that the majority of citizens demand an end to presidential term limits and are in favour of amending the Constitution. Opposition leaders and civil society groups have raised concerns that the CNDI process is not inclusive, that it is controlled by the Government and that its objective is to produce a predetermined political outcome.

In that context, the report highlights the risks associated with the prospect of constitutional reform and the potential abolition of presidential term limits under the current circumstances. While Burundians have the sovereign right to amend their Constitution, in accordance with their own laws, it was President Nkurunziza's decision to seek a disputed third term of office that triggered the country's most severe crisis since it emerged from a bloody civil war more than a decade ago.

Burundi is still suffering from the electoral crisis of 2015 and continues to face multifaceted challenges, including ongoing serious human rights violations and abuses, mass displacement of people and economic degradation. Any attempt to seek constitutional amendments to allow the President to stand for another term in office would, in the current political climate, intensify the crisis and undermine collective efforts to find a sustainable solution to the current situation.

The report also provides an update on the implementation of resolution 2303 (2016), which the Council adopted on 29 July 2016. Unfortunately, there has been no progress in thiat regard. On the contrary, the period since the adoption has seen a continuous deterioration in the Government's relations with the international community.

As detailed in the report, the Government has categorically refused to allow for the implementation of all key aspects of resolution 2303 (2016). That includes the deployment of the United Nations police component, enhanced human-rights monitoring, the strengthening of the Office of the Special Adviser and cooperation with African Union observers. The Government has also decided to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, suspend cooperation and collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has refused to cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council.

Reduced cooperation with the United Nations system is undermining efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis and to assist a population in growing need. We have tried our utmost to constructively engage with the Government and support the people of Burundi in their search for peace and stability. We engaged quietly, refrained from public criticism and encouraged modest, small steps to build confidence between the parties. Despite that moderate approach, the doors to engagement and cooperation have been largely shut by the authorities.

The report of the Secretary-General calls on the Burundian leadership to fulfil its moral obligation and political responsibility to return the country to the path of peace. I am convinced that most Burundians, including many in the Government and the ruling party, do not want to continue on the track of international isolationism, violence and repression.The international community must do its part to support those who seek a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The United Nations will always remain committed to helping the people of Burundi, and we look to the Council for further guidance on the way forward.

The President: I thank Mr. Benomar for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mkapa.

Mr. Mkapa: I wish to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. I am indebted to the Council for giving me this opportunity to update it on my work as Facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue.

Let me start by saying that, after the Heads of State of the East African Community appointed me Facilitator in order to contribute to the efforts of the mediator, President Museveni, to reach a peaceful solution to the crisis in Burundi, I have seen myself as someone who helps the parties to this crisis to get together and reach common ground peacefully. I was told that there should be no conditionalities with regard to who I meet, and that the objective was to reach a sustainable and peaceful solution. It was quite clear in

my mind that the task of facilitation was not the task of conferencing. I have therefore not been leading a constitutional conference on Burundi. Instead, I have been trying to facilitate a process in which the political parties are brought together with a view to ensuring that they can resume the spirit and the dictates of the Arusha Agreement — to which all of them are signatory — and the Constitution — which they all adopted together — so that we can avoid any further failures in the future.

I have encountered the following problems. On the one hand, the Government and the parties that are perceived as being supportive of the Government agree that the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution must serve as the basis for any solution. However, they say that much of that has already been achieved because the Constitution is being implemented fully and the spirit of the Agreement is being pursued. On the other hand, it is the view of the political opposition — both the internal and the external groups — that the Government has usurped the political space in which to undertake the political work in and governance of the country. That is the situation.

The other point that has emerged from the consultations is that each side claims to be the custodian of the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution. The tendency is to see the members of the other side as the criminals, and therefore as the ones that should receive the wrath of the State or the power of the international community. We see, therefore, that this is a situation in which the two parties are almost irreconcilable.

I tried to talk to each of the major political parties over four different sessions. I did not call a meeting. We did not meet in the same place. We did not meet in the same room, let alone sit at the same table. However, I met with the political parties. I met with representatives of civil society organizations, youth and women's organizations. I met with religious leaders, separately, and listened to them. Believe me when I say that I was lectured beyond imagination. One would have thought I was the culprit in the matter. However, I listened to them because I wanted to know what difficulties stood in the way of reaching an agreement.

After the first meeting, I asked them to reflect further. I met with them a second time in Arusha. There were some who did not want to come to Arusha in the first instance because they thought that would prejudice the impending discussions or that we were suggesting the Arusha Agreement had been abandoned. But there are those who say that we must meet in Arusha to reaffirm the spirit of the Agreement. As such, I called them. Some of them came, others did not.

The third time I met them in Bujumbura, the capital. Again, I spoke to all of them separately, and listened to them in order to see whether they had reflected further on the situation they had outlined to me. Finally, having listened to all these groups, I decided to go to the political parties that I thought would be decisive in the implementation of any agreement reached — that is, the major political parties, both internal and external. Also, I took in political leaders or political actors of consequence and influence. That group included three former Presidents, former Assembly and Senate Presidents, former party leaders and so on. I called them to Arusha for the last time, which was last month, in the hope that I could get them to talk to each other at least. To facilitate that, I outlined the four principal areas that, in my view, constitute major areas of discussion. First was the political situation in the country: what are the political obstacles that are pulling them apart? Secondly, what were the constitutional obstacles that were pulling them apart? Thirdly, what were the economic and humanitarian positions that were keeping them apart? And, finally, I asked, what are the security issues? The security issues are particularly relevant to the external opposition, who felt that they could not go back for fear of their lives or for fear that they would not be able to operate politically in safety.

This time I asked them to give me their maximum demands and their minimum requirements, in writing. That is what I did this past month. They have done so. But before that, I had asked the Government of Burundi, through the Chairman of the East African Community (EAC) Summit, the President of Tanzania, my own President; through the mediator; and through the President of Kenya, President Uhuru Kenyatta, to talk to the Government of Burundi, in order to suspend the arrest warrants against some of these political actors of substance and influence, so that they could come to Arusha and be part of the consultations.

Unfortunately, the Government did not take this request very well at all. The Government delegation did not show up and Arusha, and they told me why: because, they said, they do not want to meet these people who are under arrest warrants, and although I had said that it would not include anyone who could be directly associated with the attempted coup of 2015, they said,

no, this is enough to keep us away from Arusha, so they did not come.

But what gave me solace was that the ruling party came to Arusha this time. I gave them the documents, and they gave their responses in writing. In substance, the parties are still very far apart. They both affirm the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution arising therefrom, but each one claims to be the exclusive implementer of the Arusha agreement, that the others have abandoned it and they are the ones who are legitimate. Clearly, they are so far apart that it is difficult to bring them together.

What I decided, therefore, was that, while I was looking at the recommendations and the written responses to the questions I had raised, I would ask the Heads of State for an emergency summit meeting to give impetus to the two sides, so that they could now really think seriously about getting together and discussing these issues. I reported back to the Chairman of the East African Community Summit and to the Mediator, and I told them that now, in order to get anything done, they really had to get together and push both sides to seriously get down to the basic issues and to reach out to each other and see if they can find common ground.

I have done so, but they said, well, the next summit is only three weeks away, so we cannot have an immediate special summit. I am hoping, therefore, that at the next summit, which will be in three weeks' time, I will be able to raise these issues and argue the case for direct political intervention with both sides to make them be agreeable to getting round that same table. This is what I hope to do.

Meanwhile, my team and I are analysing, with the help of the United Nations and the African Union — that is a technical team — those responses and try to distil or synthesize a common position that could break this impasse. I still believe that it can be done; I still believe that the neighbours can have influence; I still believe that we really have no option except to continue being engaged, because Burundi is our neighbour, and one cannot choose one's neighbouring country. It is there, and therefore we have to be part of the efforts to find a solution to the crisis. That is where we are.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Fall and Ambassador Benomar and the African Union and the United Nations for their support. I wish also to thank the European Union, because it has been very instrumental not only in helping us to continue talking, but also in financing this process. I hope that it will continue to support us in that effort.

I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity. I am prepared to listen to and answer any questions that may be posed to me.

The President: I thank Mr. Mkapa very much for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lauber.

Mr. Lauber: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the activities of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The following statement has been approved in consultation with the 54 members of the configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi. The full version has been shared with the members of the Security Council.

In their most recent meetings, the members of the configuration heard reports by various United Nations entities, all of which underscored that the situation in Burundi requires sustained attention and support from international partners.

We heard reports by human rights monitoring mechanisms on the situation of public security and human rights, including on acts of violence and violations of human rights, as well as on pressure on civil-society organizations and human rights defenders.

We were briefed by United Nations Special Adviser Jamal Benomar on the ongoing political impasse, including the lack of confidence between the Government and the opposition, on the situation of the media, as well as on national, regional and international efforts to find a political settlement of the crisis. We also learned from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations country team about the deteriorating socioeconomic situation.

Regarding the socioeconomic situation, the then United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi, Mr. Paolo Lembo, and I convened Burundi's main multilateral partners on 7 and 8 November 2016 near Geneva for a socioeconomic consultation. The World Bank, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations country team and the European Union participated in those consultations.

The participants shared the view that Burundi is currently experiencing severe macroeconomic

difficulties, which are reflected in a negative growth of the gross domestic product in 2015 and 2016. Food insecurity affects a much larger part of Burundi than in 2015, and consumer prices are on the rise.

Participants identified food security and agriculture, health and education as the sectors that are most seriously affected by the current situation. Besides these sectors, the need for broader macroeconomic engagement in Burundi was emphasized, since decreasing fiscal revenues, partly related to decreased investments and direct budgetary support, put the national budget under pressure.

In view of these economic indicators, Burundi's partners showed continued readiness to address the needs of the population and to prevent a further deterioration of the socioeconomic situation.

While recognizing the importance of the contribution of Burundi in African Union and United Nations peacekeeping operations, members of the configuration expressed concerns about the signals of disengagement sent from the Government of Burundi to their regional and international partners, for instance by suspending the cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We welcome the fact that the Government of Burundi transmitted, on 24 February, to the Office of the High Commissioner in Geneva a draft agreement between the Republic of Burundi and the United Nations concerning the establishment of an office of the High Commissioner in Burundi.

Nevertheless, I am personally afraid that, faced with the current situation, the international partners may decide to disengage vis-à-vis the Government and the people of Burundi.

Peacebuilding in Burundi requires a long-term vision and sustained efforts. Abandoning Burundi now would mean wasting past efforts and putting the country and its people at risk of recurring conflict. While the primary responsibility for the well-being of the Burundian people lies with the Government of Burundi, the international partners must maintain their support for the current efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Burundi.

I would therefore like to invite Burundi's regional and international partners, in particular the relevant parts of the United Nations system, to maintain and, where possible, step up their support in the areas of peace and security, human rights, political reconciliation and institution-building, as well as with regard to humanitarian aid, socioeconomic development and preparations for credible, peaceful and democratic elections in 2020.

At the same time, I invite the Government of Burundi to recognize its partners' goodwill and to facilitate the efforts of the EAC, the AU and the United Nations in engaging with Burundi to advance the inter-Burundian dialogue and to strengthen the cooperation with both the AU and the United Nations. I welcome any efforts at reconciliation within Burundi, as well as ongoing dialogue inside and outside the country, in particular the efforts of the EAC Facilitator. In that regard, I wish to reassure President Mkapa of the continued support of the Burundi configuration of the Commission for his work.

I am planning to travel to Burundi from 27 to 31 March in order to get a first-hand impression of the situation on the ground, meet with the Government opposition and civil society, pursue the socioeconomic dialogue and brief the Government on my continuous conversation with Burundi's partners. I see the continuation of the socioeconomic dialogue not only as an opportunity to address the socioeconomic challenges, but also as a means to increase confidence between the Government and its international partners. I will keep the Security Council informed about my visit to Burundi and about the configuration's further engagement, as per established practice.

The President: I thank Mr. Lauber for his briefing, as well as all three briefers for their respective briefings and for adhering to the time limit.

The representative of Uruguay has asked for the floor to make a statement.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, first of all, to express my gratitude for the briefings by the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jamal Benomar; the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, in his capacity as East African Community Facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue; and Ambassador Jürg Lauber, in his capacity as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Uruguay is concerned about the situation in Burundi, which has not yet recovered from the electoral crisis of 2015 and continues to face numerous

challenges, in particular serious and persistent human rights abuses and violations, economic deterioration and the mass displacement of the population. In that regard, we urge all Burundian parties concerned to put their country's interests above their own and commit in good faith and without preconditions to a genuine inclusive and credible dialogue based on respecting the Arusha Agreement. It is worth repeating, time and again, that dialogue is the only way to resolve political differences in a peaceful way.

For more than two decades, the United Nations has been working closely with Burundi in search of a more solid and stable future for the country. We are concerned that, for various reasons, cooperation between Burundi and the United Nations is currently not at its optimum level, particularly after the suspension of cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other difficulties experienced with the Office of the Special Adviser in the country.

We believe that it is imperative to restore mutual trust between the Government of Burundi and the United Nations system, which will allow efforts for the development and stability of the country and the well-being of its population. In that vein, we call for a renewed commitment between the United Nations and Burundi shaped by concrete actions such as the signing of a status-of-mission agreement with the United Nations, allowing the Office of the Special Adviser to operate freely, and the conclusion of the agreement for the resumption of activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi.

Lastly, I should like to say that, if we do not act decisively and immediately through an inclusive dialogue, the suffering of the population will intensify and we will run risk of unravelling more than a decade's work of peacebuilding in the country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Shingiro (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As this is this first time that I take the floor under your presidency, Sir, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to express my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I also wish to welcome the presence of Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, East African Community Facilitator of the inter-Burundi dialogue and former President of Tanzania, to whom we renew our trust and full support. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his first report (S/2017/165) on the situation in Burundi, even though my delegation is not in agreement with some of its assertions and shortcomings.

Among other things, the report refers to what he called the intention of the current President to seek a so-called fourth term of office, thereby forgetting that constitutional matters fall exclusively under the sovereignty of States Members and that of their peoples. My delegation would like to recall that the current President is exercising his second term of office in accordance with the judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Burundi delivered on 4 May 2015 and that of the Court of the East African Community delivered on 19 July 2015, which both confirmed the legality of the candidacy of President Pierre Nkurunziza in 2015. Moreover, my delegation believes that referring to a fourth term of office that the President has not announced is indicative of the double standards of which Burundi has been a victim since 2005, because no such concern has ever been raised by another United Nations authority with regard to cases of fourth, fifth, sixth or even seventh terms of office that have been seen almost everywhere else in the world.

In paragraph 20, the report also recklessly uses the word "militia" to characterize the youth group affiliated with the ruling party. The choice of that word is inappropriate because it is falls outside the lexicon that has already been agreed in the Security Council. Dating from resolution 2248 (2015), and extending to resolutions 2303 (2016) and 2279 (2016), the Council has never used that heavily charged word, preferring on each occasion to use careful and balanced language to designate young people affiliated with political parties without singling out a specific group of young people according to certain criteria.

Furthermore, the report refers to cases of forced disappearances in Burundi. It should be recalled here that that phenomenon is a global threat from which no nation, unfortunately, is spared. The statistic of more than 200 cases in connection with that allegation was cited without supporting evidence or serious investigations, and did not take into account the cases of young people who have fled the country to undergo paramilitary training in a neighbouring country and who have been intentionally declared missing. Of the more than 150 young people handed over by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Government

of Burundi, some of them were on the list of missing persons. Caution, therefore, must be exercised before levelling such an allegation.

I will not go into the details of the report, as the time allotted to me is too short. Everyone has received a comprehensive document that contains our comments and observations in connection with the report. I will now quickly skip to the political, security and human rights situation in Burundi.

On the political level, the Commission nationale de dialogue interburundais continues as normal both at home and abroad. At the external level, we commend the outstanding work of the Facilitator of inter-Burundi dialogue, His Excellency Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, who just organized the fourth dialogue session in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, which took place from 16 to 19 February. We reiterate our confidence in, and support for, his work. The Government of Burundi remains committed in a spirit of good faith to that process in an inclusive manner, with the exception, of course, of the coup leaders of 13 May 2015, who today are on the run and under the protection of certain United Nations States Members.

From the security perspective, while we recognize the several challenges that continue to require our attention, the situation on the ground is apparent, which no one can deny. The overall security situation throughout the country is good.

With regard to human rights and imprisonments, several hundred prisoners have been released since 2015. In 2017, 2,500 prisoners benefited from a presidential pardon granted at the end of 2016. Among those, 2,246 have already rejoined their families.

With regard to freedom of expression, 20 public and private local radio stations, 4 community radio stations, 7 radio stations broadcasting on the territory of Burundi, 2 local news agencies, 24 public and private periodicals, 17 Internet sites and 12 associations and professional bodies of the press are operational. In addition to these private radio stations, international radio stations include Radio France Internationale, the Voice of America and Deutsche Welle.

As regards the freedoms of assembly, opinion, association and religion, the Government has already approved more than 6,500 non-profit associations, of which more than 100 have been approved since January 2016. Fifteen non-profit organizations that had been under investigation since the failed coup d'état of May 13 2015 were authorized to reopen.

With regard to cooperation between the United Nations and Burundi, my Government's great concern is to strengthen and perpetuate our relations with the United Nations. In order to ensure the presence of the United Nations in the field of human rights, a draft cooperation agreement with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is under discussion between the two parties. The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General is also functioning. We eagerly await the appointment of another United Nations official to lead the Burundi dossier and expedite the signature of the framework for cooperation between Burundi and the Office.

We commend the fruitful cooperation with the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, led by the Ambassador of Switzerland, my colleague Jürg Lauber.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7896

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7896th meeting
Friday, 10 March 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of the victims of terrorism in Afghanistan

The President: We begin this meeting on Afghanistan with a tragic reminder of the ultimate price that too many have paid to help build the future of their country. I would like to ask that the Council observe a minute of silence in memory of all recent victims of terrorism in Afghanistan, including the victims of the attack on Kabul military hospital on Wednesday, which claimed more than 50 lives and left many more wounded.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Spain and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/189, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: The National Unity Government is almost halfway through its five-year term. We have seen some of the fruits of its efforts, and yet much remains to be done. Fortunately, the ground is being prepared to make Afghanistan a success. Internationally, Warsaw and Brussels set the stage for steady progress. Domestically, the National Unity Government has introduced programmes to improve social services and promote growth and development. Now is the time for action to deliver concrete outcomes that will improve Afghan lives today and for the future.

A major challenge is at hand. The Government has to pursue both an inclusive peace process and economic growth against the backdrop of an intensifying insurgency and worsening security. As the Afghan Government redoubles its efforts to tackle these challenges, strong international backing — political and financial — is required for the work ahead. Allow me to highlight three areas where the Afghan Government has made visible steps forward. These areas include anti-corruption, the electoral process and women's economic empowerment.

First, the Government is making a break with the past by taking new steps to address corruption. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is now prosecuting cases. In parallel, the Government has taken steps to address corruption through a range of institutional reforms, such as efforts to restore integrity to the management of public services. We need, however, to acknowledge that much remains to be done, including addressing corruption in the security institutions. That will require political leadership and strong determination. I have the pleasure to inform the Council that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will launch its first anti-corruption report, entitled "Afghanistan's other battlefield: The fight against corruption", very soon. The report highlights the Government's achievements in addressing corruption and recommends options for further progress.

Secondly, the Government has committed at the highest levels to hold parliamentary elections that are seen as fair, inclusive and transparent by the Afghan people. The commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints

Commission are appointed. It is encouraging to see them making preparations for elections and pushing the electoral reform agenda forward. However, rebuilding trust in the electoral process will be challenging. I am hopeful that all stakeholders will invest in an inclusive process and build the broad political support necessary for improved elections.

Thirdly, just two days ago, on International Women's Day, the Government launched the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme. The plan recognizes women as key economic actors whose contributions to Afghanistan's future are essential. While this is an important step forward, Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman. For many women, the story is one of discrimination, poverty and oppression. If that story is to change, women must be allowed full participation and leadership and be respected as decision-makers at all levels. This will require the strong support of the Afghan Government, civil society and international partners.

Let me elaborate on the issues of development and economic growth. It is imperative that growth strategies start to deliver concrete results. In part due to the worsening security situation over the past two years, service delivery has become increasingly difficult. We have witnessed some downward trends in key indicators, such as access to health clinics and education facilities. Nine million people, or close to one-third of the population, live below the poverty line, and given population growth, per capita gross domestic product is expected to go down. We need to act now to reverse this course.

The commitments made in Brussels, as well as the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and the Citizen's Charter provide an essential opportunity for progress in that regard. This is, however, neither an easy nor a simple process. The efforts of the Afghan Government will require the continuing, well-coordinated support of international partners. More focused action on governance, social services and private sector development to promote equitable growth will be necessary. We must work hand in hand to make a discernible change in the lives of all Afghans so that they feel the upwards lift of economic and social progress.

Developing a nation while fighting an insurgency is an uphill struggle. Improving the security environment is essential to realizing economic growth and delivering on the ambitious plans which that country's citizens deserve. The deteriorating security situation remains of great concern. Armed clashes continued unabated in early 2017, despite the cold winter months. I am gravely concerned about reports pointing to an intense spring fighting season. Everything should be done to improve security. We must also remain vigilant about the presence of foreign fighters, including Da'esh.

Last year, UNAMA recorded the worst number of civilian casualties since we began keeping records nearly a decade ago. The horrific attack two days ago is testimony to the heavy price Afghans pay. This trend must be reversed. While parties to the conflict have expressed commitments to protecting civilians, concrete efforts must be made to ensure that such statements translate into real protection for Afghan civilians and reduce casualties. I look forward to the formal adoption and implementation of the national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation by the Government of Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are preventable. I also encourage the Government to follow through on steps taken to break the culture of impunity and to make it clear that nobody is above the law.

Deteriorating security also led to the highest-ever level of internal displacement in 2016. More than 650,000 Afghans were displaced; returns from Pakistan exceeded 620,000 people. Displacements and returns for 2017 are likely to remain at these levels. These trends demand a major humanitarian response in the short term. The Government has shown strong leadership in developing plans for the long-term integration of the displaced and returnees, but sustained international assistance is essential.

There clearly can be no military solution in Afghanistan. It must be acknowledged that a prolonged conflict will lead only to further misery for the Afghan people and undermine the very foundations for economic growth and development.

Since my last briefing (see S/PV.7844), I have travelled the region extensively to discuss how neighbouring countries can support or play a proactive role in peace efforts. I have been encouraged. I sense that countries in the neighbourhood are more ready to work towards bringing peace to Afghanistan. They recognize the importance of establishing an environment conducive to peace and regional stability. For these reasons, I urge the countries concerned,

particularly in the neighbourhood, to support the Afghan Government's interest in an intensified regional peace effort. UNAMA is working closely with the Afghan Government for that purpose. In that regard, I am deeply troubled by the heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and call for the reduction of tensions through dialogue.

The future of Afghanistan has to be built through an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process for all Afghans. The path of peace must be pursued through negotiations and not through violence. The Taliban should enter peace talks without preconditions. I call on all relevant actors to exercise their influence to that end. The Government, neighbouring countries and other key Powers should reinforce the message that the Taliban can be a part of Afghanistan's future and its political and social fabric.

Afghanistan's future must be placed above all considerations. An endless conflict and violence are simply not acceptable. We all need to make peace our new and absolute imperative. In close consultation with the Afghan Government, UNAMA stands ready to move the process forward and to help generate momentum for peace. Afghanistan's most important battle ahead is that for a lasting peace. UNAMA looks forward to the adoption of the renewed mandate by the Council. We wish to reassure you, Sir, of our commitment to the ever-more effective discharge of our mandate for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Samar.

Ms. Samar: I am very much delighted to brief the Security Council on Afghanistan. I would like to thank you, Sir, and Security Council members for their support to my country, Afghanistan, and the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I hope that the mandate of UNAMA will be extended and expanded by the Council, and should also like to stress that the full and strengthened presence of the United Nations and the international community is vital for peace, stability, security and the protection of human rights in Afghanistan. I would like to thank UNAMA for its presence and its work in support of our people, institutions, security and peace.

I am pleased to say that Afghanistan has transformed in many ways. The achievements and progress of the country have been immense and beyond my capacity to describe in this meeting in the allotted time. Nonetheless, we should celebrate our progress and transformation and acknowledge the bravery, shared responsibility and sacrifices we have made through the course of our progress.

One of the areas that I want to highlight is that of my responsibility as Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan. We all remember — colleagues who have been supporting Afghanistan remember — that 16 years ago the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. They ruled the country with violence, extrajudicial killings, threats and intimidation and barbaric execution of people. They ruled by denying the Afghan people's rights, freedom and dignity, and they were proud of violating women's rights — lashing women in public and closing schools and offices to women. Women were not even allowed to go shopping without male members of their family. The Taliban still do the same to the people who live under their rule and influence. But in most of the country we have transformed that situation, where freedom, human rights and equality for women and men are constitutionally guaranteed. Afghanistan's Constitution established an Independent Human Rights Commission to monitor, promote and protect human rights, and obligated the State to observe human rights and international treaties Afghanistan has signed and become a party to. The country acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and signed onto the International Criminal Court (ICC), in addition to five other main international human rights instruments.

With a strong and modern Constitution, we have also achieved a real and meaningful review of our laws, have adopted new laws in support of human rights and have put in place policies and programmes that promote and protect human rights in the country. The following are examples of the progress we have made on human rights, and also challenges and threats that we face in the country. I spoke of progress and challenges, and I would now like to elaborate further.

On women's rights, we celebrated 8 March in Afghanistan by issuing a report on violence against women. We have noted that progress has been made on addressing violence against women, which includes the approval and implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women and numerous policies, including the national action plan on women

and peace and security. The report also acknowledges that the Government has taken concrete steps in giving women an opportunity to apply for high office, and the number of women in key Cabinet and Government positions has increased. Women are striving for equality, justice, recognition and meaningful participation in Government, and they have had some success.

However, I am sad to say that, despite all the progress we have made, women are not yet treated equally. Women are victims of violence, and that remains a very sad story of our time. Violence against women is committed at home and in society, and by terrorist groups in very barbaric ways. Many women have been killed, stoned or mutilated by the Taliban — among the horrible incidents that women hear of and fear every day. On the other hand, the lack of a strong rule-of-law system, harmful traditions, corruption and a continuing culture of impunity continue to be factors that contribute to violence against women.

Access to education has been the most important progress in Afghanistan. More than 8 million children are now enrolled in schools, and more than 30 per cent of them are girls. Education is key to a prosperous and strong Afghanistan. However, war and threats from terrorist groups remain a real barrier to the expansion and improvement of access to education. They continue to close girls' schools and do not allow modern education for boys. Terrorist groups attacking cities and villages deprive our children of access to education.

Four decades of war and conflict have destroyed the foundation of justice, the rule of law and good governance. We still have a weak judiciary and rule-of-law institutions, while the concept of good governance is a new phenomenon in the country. Support for justice, the rule of law and good governance is a key issue for the United Nations to focus on. Supporting the Government to ensure justice and the rule of law by respecting the independence of the judiciary and fighting corruptions is a key for a democratic Afghanistan.

Democracy and democratic space for everyone must be preserved and enhanced. Elections and electoral processes have always been chaotic in our country. As an early-warning system and for preventing any disputes, it is important that UNAMA play its role to assist and support the electoral system. We would like to see the Government of Afghanistan and the international community support and ensure transparent, free and fair elections. The new Independent Election Commission needs support, and the Government must prevent any interference in the electoral process in order to build the confidence of the public in democratic processes.

The security and safety of Afghans is a prerequisite for everything in Afghanistan. I am sad to announce here that we — both the international community and Afghans — have not been able to secure Afghanistan. The lack of security in Afghanistan results in huge displacement, refugees and increased poverty. Roads and villages are not safe, and people are taken hostage and killed. We hope that the international community will continue to contribute to our security. The presence of the United Nations and the international security forces is needed as a gesture of the world's commitment to our security.

Civil society and human rights and women's rights defenders play an important role in Afghanistan. They try to hold the Government accountable and champion the protection of the rights and dignity of Afghans. Threats and intimidation against them are increasing. We are happy to say that we have developed a national action plan on protecting human rights defenders in Afghanistan. I would like to urge the Security Council to consider adopting a draft resolution on the importance of civil society and human rights defenders and their protection.

Economic development is key to a better, free and democratic Afghanistan. The country has the potential to be a prosperous country. However, currently over 40 per cent of Afghans live below the poverty line, and more than 60 per cent are extremely poor and face food insecurity. We hope that the international community and the Afghan Government will continue their investment in trade and the economy. The Council could consider calling on our neighbouring country to open its borders to economic transactions, and not limit trade for political purposes. Unfortunately, the closure of the border by Pakistan has had an immense effect on the people and on humanitarian needs. UNAMA could ease tensions in the region and support Afghanistan in dealing with its regional issues.

The people of Afghanistan need and deserve to live in peace. While we welcome any meaningful steps towards achieving peace, we must note that the standard of not talking to terrorists must be the same everywhere in the world. If Da'esh and other terrorist groups are not to be negotiated with, then why are some countries talking to the Taliban? The Taliban are terrorists, and

we should deal with them in the same way as we do Da'esh and other terrorist groups. In the meantime, the lack of accountability and respect for justice and human rights in the peace process is a failure; it does not lead to sustainable peace and security. We are disappointed with the Security Council's decision to take the name of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from the sanctions list, as well as the blanket amnesty that the Government of Afghanistan provided to him and his commanders. We believe they have committed crimes and violated human rights in the past four decades. Despite the adoption of a national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), our country is lagging behind in implementation and in significantly including women in peace and security processes. UNAMA should support an inclusive peace process, with emphasis on accountability and justice for victims of human rights violations.

Attacks against the Hazara community is a tragic fact in Afghanistan. That ethnic group has been targeted systematically by both Da'esh and the Taliban. The Government of Afghanistan must do more to protect this ethnic group against the immediate threat of Da'esh and the Taliban, and bring to justice those who commit crimes against them.

Afghanistan is not a safe place for returnees. I would like to emphasize that the world community must pay attention to the need and the plight of Afghans who seek refuge worldwide. Forcibly deporting and discriminating against refugees based on their origin is not in conformity with the international law.

Transitional justice is a very important factor in ending impunity and promoting a culture of accountability. The four periods of war requires an established framework to deal with war crimes and crimes against humanity. I strongly urge the Council to expand the mandate of UNAMA to include transitional justice, and also to facilitate the intervention of the ICC in Afghanistan.

I come from Kabul, the capital. The city was attacked last week, and again this week. Many people died. The recent attacks in front of the Parliament buildings, the Supreme Court, a police station and, two days ago, on a hospital are inhuman acts and show that terrorism and the supporters of terrorism in the region continue to kill innocent people and have no regard for any values or norms, let alone international laws and basic human rights. Last year alone, over 11,000 people were killed or injured in Afghanistan, most of them by armed opposition to the Government. The continuation of terrorism and conflict has placed Afghanistan in danger. The danger to the very existence of the country, its democratic system, human rights, freedom and economy is immense and immanent. That causes frustration and disappointment and inflicts pain on the Afghan people on a daily basis.

International law and the Constitution require Afghanistan to honour its obligation to respect, protect and honour human rights. The country must combat the human rights violations that occur daily and are committed by influential people, and also fight meaningfully and effectively against torture and the inhumane and degrading treatment of people. It must bring to justice all officials who violate human rights.

Good governance and strong institutions serving to enforce the law and fight against corruption are key to promote, protect and achieve human rights in Afghanistan. I would like to call on the international community to coordinate and cooperate with the Afghan government in that regard. Establishing parallel structures for short-term quick fixes, which undermine the actual responsibility of formal institutions, will not solve the problem. We all know that human rights, development and peace and security are interconnected and require stable, strong, transparent and accountable institutions, with inclusive citizen participation.

Finally, I reiterate that the protection and promotion of human rights are a shared responsibility, and the people of Afghanistan need the Council's continued support. In that context, Afghanistan is a candidate for the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020. I look forward to the full support for our candidacy by Member States. I call upon the international community and the United Nations to support the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to independently continue its job to monitor, protect and promote human rights. The people of Afghanistan deserve to live in full dignity.

The President: I thank Ms. Samar for her briefing. I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me congratulate the United Kingdom on its leadership of the Security Council this month. I thank the Secretary-General, António Guterres, for presenting his first report (S/2017/189) on the situation in Afghanistan. Allow me to also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, and the Chair of

the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Ms. Sima Samar, for their respective briefings.

Given the severity of the situation in my country, I would like to devote my statement today to the challenging security situation, hidden agendas, the peace process and the ever-increasing necessity for regional and global cooperation.

In recent months, dozens of terrorist attacks across Afghanistan have claimed scores of innocent lives. In January, three simultaneous terrorist attacks in Kabul, Kandahar and Helmand provinces killed or maimed more than 160 people, including six United Arab Emirates diplomats. In February, the Supreme Court, our symbol of justice, was attacked, thereby causing numerous fatalities. Last week, two separate attacks in the heart of Kabul killed many civilians. Finally, just two days ago, Afghanistan's largest hospital was attacked, leaving more than 140 killed or wounded, many of whom were doctors, nurses or patients. The Taliban has claimed responsibility for most of those attacks, but regardless of whose names are labelled upon them, our own investigations have clearly established that they were generally plotted beyond our borders and on the other side of the Durand Line.

That is the fundamental factor that needs to be addressed. The Security Council promptly issued a press statement (SC/12743) condemning those attacks in the strongest terms, for which we are thankful. The statement underlined,

> "the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice".

It also urged

> "all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Afghan authorities in this regard."

That is indeed what Afghanistan has been asking for over the course of many years. My Government and my people would like to know why, after countless terrorist atrocities and specific Security Council statements condemning them, we are still witness to impunity for the perpetrators and orchestrators of endless violence.

Let me be very clear: the conflict in our country is not homegrown, as some desperately and deceptively try to portray it. On the contrary, it is the nexus of illicit narcotics, violent extremism and State sponsorship of terrorism, with their regional dimensions and global consequences. Tragically, it has morphed into an undeclared war by a neighbouring State that has for many years continued to coordinate, facilitate and orchestrate violence through proxy forces and more than 20 terrorist networks. Those groups benefit from a full-fledged external infrastructure to keep Afghanistan off-balance, for motives that are inconsistent with our desire to live in a peaceful and prosperous region.

In earlier statements to the Council, we have emphasized, time and again, Pakistani actions that sustain terrorist activities in our country. Today, let me quote the leading Pakistani officials themselves. General Pervez Musharraf, who led Pakistan for eight years as President, proudly commented in a 2015 interview with *The Guardian* newspaper that

> "Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence had given birth to the Taliban to counter Indian action against Pakistan".

Last year, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, went on record to say that Taliban leaders reside in Pakistan and that they have influence over them. A couple of weeks ago, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, Russia, China and India and Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Iraq and Sudan, wrote in *The Herald* magazine of Pakistan,

> "[a]fter the Soviet defeat and withdrawal, we (wittingly or unwittingly) unleashed a ruinous civil war and imposed a barbaric and medieval Taliban upon the hapless Afghan people".

His words only confirm the truth that "Pakistan talks one policy, but walks the other".

In a 2013 article in *The New York Times*, Mr. Husain Haqqani, another former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States and Sri Lanka, categorized in clear terms the ongoing links between Pakistan's State apparatus and the Taliban and mentioned in the context of peace talks that

> "the Taliban and their Pakistani mentors have hardly changed their arguments or their tendency to fudge facts".

The quotes and admissions that I just read out were not rhetoric from Kabul or emblematic of a blame game,

as is often claimed by a known Member State. That was Pakistan talking.

Against that backdrop, in February, a series of unfortunate terrorist attacks in Pakistan killed dozens and wounded many more innocent men, women and children. As has always been the case, Afghans always share the pain and anguish of their Pakistani brothers and sisters. However, the Government of Pakistan, immediately and without any regard for any investigative process or clear facts, blamed Afghanistan for the attacks and resorted to increased breaches of its territorial integrity, closing main border crossings, blockading trade and transit and harassing our nationals travelling to, or living in, their country. Such measures constitute a clear violation of the principles of the World Trade Organization and the rights of land-locked countries, including their access to the sea.

From January until today, we have recorded at least 59 instances of violations of Afghan territory by Pakistan's military forces, including three violations of our airspace, over 1,375 cross-frontier artillery shellings which caused dozens of casualties, the displacement of 450 families in the middle of a cold winter in our eastern provinces, the burning of our forests, illegal construction of infrastructure near the frontier region, and hostile maneuvering of tanks and heavy weaponry.

The travesty of decorum in neighbourly relations did not cease there, as the familiar pattern of the obfuscation of facts and diversionary tactics took over. We were then issued by the Government of Pakistan a list of 76 so-called suspected terrorists in Afghanistan which, after close inspection by us and our international partners, was found to be in desperate need of verification.

Our reaction to all these provocations has been sober and methodical. We have submitted 25 protest notes to the Government of Pakistan and, in the past few weeks, have summoned their Ambassador to Kabul on three occasions. We have submitted to their Government a list of 86 known terrorists and 32 Taliban training centres, including Haqqani network centres, asking for their immediate closure. We have asked for a third-party verification of the two sides' efforts. No response has yet been received. The Secretary-General, the Security Council and other international partners are all appraised of these developments.

While terrorist attacks in Pakistan are strongly deplored by our Government, we are surely witnessing the blowback effects of using violent proxies as instruments of foreign policy, which was adopted by decision-making circles in that country in the 1980s and is still being pursued to this day. In other words, the chickens are coming home to roost. We have reminded our Pakistani counterparts on many occasions that you reap what you sow. We say once again that it is time for Pakistan to change that failed policy for its own sake, desist from using radical terrorists as a foreign policy accessory, and genuinely join the international fight against all forms and shades of terrorism.

By making Afghanistan bleed, Pakistan is not only trying to create a stalemate on the battlefield, but it is also hindering the political track. Hoping to gain legitimacy for groups, such as the Taliban, Pakistani decision-makers continue to use plausible deniability and shifting blame, as part of their defensive tactics while manipulating geopolitical fault lines to their advantage. They forget that legitimacy in my country flows through the people and constitutional order, not through acts of terror, intimidation and forced imposition of extremist thinking and radical behaviour by misinterpreting and misusing our sacred religion of Islam. Talks leading to a peace process can only succeed when policy is revised, the use of sanctuaries is prohibited, terrorist financing is curbed and violence is renounced. Peace cannot be achieved by paying lip service and pretending to be a selective victim.

As we speak, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are battling, with great resilience and determination, a network of regional and global terrorist groups, who have come to Afghanistan with various objectives. In 2016, our forces prevented the Taliban and terrorist affiliates from capturing major population centres. In January, we adopted a four-year national security strategy, which focuses on bolstering combat capabilities, leadership development and improving unity and coordination of command. The fight against terrorism will continue with even greater resolve, on the basis of our security strategy. That said, continued support from our international partners remains critical for the sustainability of our forces over the long haul. In that light, I wish to reiterate here again that Afghanistan's strategic partnerships will in no way be a detriment to any country within our region or beyond. On the contrary, investments in Afghanistan's security are in fact an investment in regional and global security.

For years, the lack of a meaningful and results-oriented channel of dialogue aimed at addressing the

root causes of tension between Kabul and Islamabad has created a huge trust deficit. Reducing this deficit requires political will and healthy interactions between our two countries. On our part, if we look at the record, Afghanistan has always been ready to engage in constructive and results-oriented dialogue.

We welcome any earnest and transparent initiative to help us reach that stage of dialogue. In our view, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the recent six-party Moscow conference on Afghanistan can be useful in that endeavour, if utilized and coordinated properly. These initiatives, among others, emphasize a set of guiding principles, most notably that any peace process should be Afghan-led and that the region must support the Afghan Government in its quest for sustainable peace. Moreover, they also recognize the importance of having all relevant regional and global actors on board in a constructive manner.

We know from previous experience that any prospect of success in peace efforts rests on a number of important principles.First, any attempt at resolving current and/or historic issues between Governments requires strong national political will and an impartial and agreed upon international arbitrator in good standing. Secondly, all sides need to define and agree on the scope of dialogue and negotiations, leading to a specific set of deliverables and outcomes that can be supported by regional stakeholders and eventually guaranteed by the international community. Thirdly, all sides need to be willing to address the root causes of conflict, not its byproducts, and resolve areas of contention by adhering to and making use of international law, pragmatic precedence and/or other best practices and judicial norms, and avoiding presumed realpolitik assumptions. Fourthly, given Afghanistan's sensitive geopolitical position, all peacebuilding and anti-terrorism efforts in the long run need to have all key stakeholders on board, take the complexities of an evolving regional and global security architecture into account, and agree to a status that assures stability, balance, non-interference, sovereignty and positive engagement in Afghanistan. Fifthly, keeping principles of sovereignty and non-interference central to our objectives requires Afghanistan to become a symbol of international cooperation, where global and regional powers set aside their rivalries and short-term interests by agreeing to cooperate in a spirit of confidence for long-term mutual benefit.

In a few days we will celebrate Nowruz — the start of our New Year and the first day of spring — a festive occasion that symbolizes peace, solidarity and togetherness among our people and the wider region at large. But as recent attacks have shown, Afghans will celebrate with a heavy heart. On the other hand, with their planned so-called spring offensive, the Taliban and other terrorist groups are adamantly focused on producing more horror, panic and fear, leaving little room for joy among our men, women and children.

This time, we hope to collectively counter their new season of murder and mayhem. Our brave and courageous national security forces are ready and highly determined to defend our people with full confidence and strength. We survived the post-transition 2015; we countered and defeated every major plan of the terrorist groups and their foreign backers to capture and control the main population centres in 2016; and in 2017 we will, with the Council's support and by the grace of God Almighty, humiliate and destroy the enemies of peace and security in Afghanistan. We are fully committed to making sure that our New Year will be one in which we will open the way for durable peace in our country, our region and around the world. We join Secretary-General António Guterres in his appeal to the international community for making 2017 a year of peace. For us, it starts at home.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council. I would like to remind all speakers that as per presidential note S/2010/507, the presidency encourages all speakers to conclude their remarks within five minutes. The red microphone light will flash to indicate when the five minutes is up, meaning that it is time for a delegation to wrap up its remarks. We have a full morning of speakers inscribed on the list and a busy afternoon as well, so if necessary I will use the gavel to respectfully encourage speakers to stick to the time limit.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar, of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their informative briefings today. They have given us useful insights into the situation in Afghanistan today and how the international community might assist the Afghan people. We are working with the other members of the Council to prepare a new draft resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which we expect to adopt next week.

As the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2017/189) makes clear, there is little good news coming from Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are at a record high, an alarming trend that has continued since 2013. Some 30,000 people have now died in the course of the conflict. Nearly 1,000 children were killed in 2016 alone. That is an appalling waste of life and potential for Afghanistan's future. The numbers are particularly tragic because human resources and human development must be the foundation of Afghanistan's future economic development and self-reliance. This year will continue to present grave challenges for security in Afghanistan. The Council has already issued four press statements condemning terrorist attacks. While there are many initiatives and ongoing efforts regarding security in Afghanistan, what we need most are concrete results that counter the negative trends we are seeing.

We should continue to insist on seeing progress made with Afghanistan's anti-corruption and reform agenda, while also exploring mid-term and long-term engagement that can strengthen the country's basis for socioeconomic development. Employment is key. Japan's approach in that regard is not as visible as the various regional cooperation projects highlighted in the related documents on Afghanistan. We believe that the emphasis should be on strengthening the resilience of society. That includes supporting core industries such as agriculture through market rehabilitation and access, and backing the Government's comprehensive national agricultural development priority programme, which will help to increase employment.

We must address the imminent security threats. We appreciated the outcome of the NATO Warsaw Summit last year and its steady implementation. The Resolute Support Mission's role is essential. Regional cooperation also contributes to security, and we ask UNAMA to coordinate the various efforts for maximum impact. Improving capacity and human resources in the security sector is especially important. Afghanistan requires a combination of short-term efforts and mid-to-long-term engagement. Japan would like to once again emphasize the importance of a results-based approach that goes beyond mere commitments. Only actual implementation and outcomes will bring hope to the Afghan people, through fewer casualties, higher employment, more training and more land for better agricultural production.

As the lead country in the Council on this dossier, Japan will strive to create greater opportunities for better understanding the actual situation on the ground and how the Council can do a better job of supporting concrete improvements in security and development. We hope that will link to reinvigorated discussion in New York and a better future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/189) on Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). And I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the report itself, which we have found very useful, particularly for those, like us, who make no claim to deep knowledge of the Afghan situation. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and the Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission for their remarks.

Despite the notable progress that has been made in the three areas that Mr. Yamamoto referred to in his briefing, Afghanistan continues to face enormous challenges, as the Secretary-General's report and the statement by the representative of Afghanistan, even more so, make clear. It is self-evident that the country needs understanding and support. It seems that the political situation, including at the highest level, also needs coherence. It is in the light of this situation that we see the need for sustained support and cooperation on the part of the international community if Afghanistan is to overcome those challenges. In that regard, the efforts of UNAMA to promote peace, reconciliation and development in Afghanistan, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and the Afghan Government's leadership and ownership of the process, continue to be very important, and we support the renewal of its mandate for another year.

As the Secretary-General's report clearly states, the security situation has not been improving. On the contrary, it was worse in 2016 than in 2015, and that trend appears to be continuing this year. The report underlines, quite appropriately in our view, the fact that it is civilians who are paying the highest price. The threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other armed groups are a serious security concern not only for the country but also the wider region. The increasing numbers

of terrorist attacks, such as those that occurred recently in Kabul and other parts of the country, are a clear indication of how far the security situation has deteriorated. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our firm condemnation of the terrorist attacks and to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims as well as the people and the Government of Afghanistan. The illegal trafficking of drugs has been further complicating the security situation in Afghanistan and the wider region.

As Special Representative Yamamoto indicated, Afghanistan's long-term security and stability can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process. In that connection, we note the progress that has been made in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin, including the lifting of sanctions against Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. However, we understand that the peace talks between the Government and the Taliban have remained stalled. Obviously, listening to the statement by the representative of Afghanistan, we can see how that process is indeed daunting. As the Secretary-General's report notes, the role of other countries in the region is also critical to creating the necessary conditions for advancing the peace efforts.

Lastly, the political and security situation in Afghanistan will not improve if we do not take a comprehensive approach to addressing the economic and development challenges facing the country. It is imperative that the international community provide coordinated support to reconstruction and development efforts through the implementation of the national framework for peace and development in Afghanistan. We hope that the commitments made at the Brussels conference last October will be honoured.

I would like to conclude by expressing our support for and solidarity with the Afghan Government in its herculean task of addressing the country's multiple challenges with a view to promoting peace, reconciliation and development. I also wish to express our appreciation to UNAMA for its role in support of those endeavours and its efforts to fulfil its mandate under difficult circumstances.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, and to pay tribute to Ms. Sima Samar for her work and courage as a powerful voice for human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan. I welcome the fact that she is the first woman ever to speak in the Security Council on Afghanistan.

Italy strongly condemns the heinous terrorist attack that took place two days ago at a Kabul military hospital, as well as all other attacks that have been carried out in that country. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of all of the victims.

We also reiterate our support for the efforts of the Government of National Unity to combat terrorism and violent extremism, which continue to represent serious threats to the security and stability of Afghanistan. It is essential to have Afghan security and defence forces that are capable of addressing those persistent challenges effectively and autonomously.

In the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italy is committed to providing tangible support to the Government of Afghanistan's in its efforts to strengthen the national defence security force. The members of the force deserve to be recognized for their bravery. We also note the important progress achieved thus far in improving the capability of the security forces, also thanks to NATO and its partners for their assistance. We hope those achievements can serve as a solid foundation for further progress.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) statistics for 2016 consistently show high levels of violence in the Afghan conflict. We are deeply concerned about the further increase in civilian casualties, as outlined in the Secretary-General report (S/2017/189), as well as the alarming situation of internally displaced persons and returnees. Our imperative must be to work together, to renew our efforts to break the spiral of violence and to lay the foundation for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

In that context, my country wishes to reiterate its full support for the commitment of the Government of National Unity to launch an Afghan-led and -owned peace process. That objective would require the constructive involvement of all international and regional stakeholders capable of making a significant contribution. In that regard, especially in its capacity as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Italy strongly supports all of those initiatives.

In order to increase opportunities for dialogue and political understanding in Afghanistan between the Government and the insurgent movements, it is essential that there also be a positive climate and true

cooperation among neighbouring countries. It is our sincere hope that this condition will soon be met on the basis of enduring common interests, such as the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, which is a dangerous destabilizing factor — not only for Afghanistan but for the region as a whole.

Achieving peace, stability and development in Afghanistan also requires the consolidation of its institutions and the transformation of the State through effective Government action that can meet the needs and legitimate expectations of its people. The Government of National Unity is engaged in a fundamental reform process, most recently as it concerns the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the priority national programmes. We therefore welcome the determination of the Government of Afghanistan and the many results already achieved in various sectors.

Together with our partners in the international community, Italy renewed its tangible support for that internal reform process at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan last October. Nevertheless, it is crucial that those reform efforts, for which an internally cohesive Government is an essential prerequisite, continue making further progress towards self-reliance. Quick and decisive action towards further reform is especially important in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people. Should those hopes be dashed, it will inevitably lead to distrust in the institution of the State.

The fight against corruption must continue to be a top priority. We therefore appreciate the engagement and the initial measures adopted by the Government in that regard, and we urge it to proceed resolutely forward in that struggle.

Another priority must continue to be the persistent defence and promotion of the rights of women and their empowerment at every level of society. We are therefore concerned about the risk of setbacks in that area, such as limited access to education for young women and girls — also due to the deteriorating security situation. We invite the Government of Afghanistan to make further efforts in that regard. Furthermore, we hope that the affirmation of the rights of women can also be achieved with a view to promoting the peace process through their active participation in the framework of future negotiations.

In the light of encouraging developments in recent months in the area of elections, we urge the Government of Afghanistan to prioritize the completion of the reform process, so as to allow for the holding of parliamentary district elections in a democratic, transparent and inclusive manner.

Afghanistan's Government can count on the international community's full support, which has provided an exceptional level of assistance to that end. But Afghan institutions have to be in the driver's seat, as the primary responsibility for progress lies with them, in keeping with the principle of mutual accountability, which today, more than ever, constitutes a cornerstone of our partnership.

Lastly, in the difficult and complex circumstances that Afghanistan is currently facing, UNAMA continues to play an essential role in coordinating the international community's support, with the common goal of achieving peace and sustainable development for the Afghan people. Italy therefore associates itself with the expression of warm appreciation for its work and supports the upcoming renewal of its mandate.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Let me join others in thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing this morning. We very much welcome the report (S/2017/189) of the Secretary-General, which underlines the important work being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We believe that UNAMA continues to play a critical role in the stabilization process and in preventing renewed conflict in Afghanistan. We are particularly pleased to see the significant attention given to women and peace and security in the report. In that light, I would also like to welcome today's very rich briefing by Ms. Sima Samar.

Sweden remains fully committed to supporting the Afghan people on their path to a democratic, prosperous and peaceful society. The report before us today makes clear that there is still some distance to travel on that journey. It shows that, while progress has been made in some areas, the economic, political and security outlook remains bleak. Moving forward will require the full implementation of the economic and political reforms pledged by the Government at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. We welcome UNAMA's continued efforts to support Afghanistan's full assumption of leadership and ownership for its security, governance and development, consistent with the transformation decade. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto just highlighted,

the international community cannot afford to lose focus of the socioeconomic development of Afghanistan. We must channel our efforts to supporting equitable growth that can tangibly deliver employment and prosperity for all Afghans, particularly Afghanistan's youth.

We encourage the Government to continue to take the necessary steps towards holding free, inclusive and transparent elections that are credible in the eyes of the Afghan people. Women's full and equal participation in the electoral process is essential. We urge UNAMA to continue to pay increased attention to women's participation in the electoral and political processes in its reporting. Women's full and active participation in public and political spheres is crucial to ensuring lasting peace and the elimination of poverty. Women's meaningful inclusion in the peace process, including the ongoing implementation of the peace agreement with Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin is therefore vital. Excluding half of the population from the peace process is not only wrong, but shortsighted. Women's inclusion in peace processes has been proven to lead to more successful and sustainable peace agreements.

The humanitarian, human rights and the security situation in Afghanistan remains alarming. We are particularly concerned to hear that the number of civilian casualties is at the highest level since 2009 — many of them children. Indeed, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child. Shockingly, in 2015, one out of every four casualties in Afghanistan was a child. Children also live in fear of abduction, hunger and recruitment as child soldiers. We call on all parties to the conflict to stop all targeted and deliberate attacks against civilians and to take all the necessary measures to protect them.

All violations of international humanitarian law must be condemned. We strongly condemn the recent attack on the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as Wednesday's attack on a hospital in Kabul. All parties to the conflict must implement and respect resolution 2286 (2016), pertaining to the protection of health care in conflicts. We call on the Afghan Government to report to the Secretary-General on measures taken to implement the resolution. Places where the young and the sick seek support should never be targeted.

Building peaceful and inclusive societies is not easy. It takes courage and determination from all parties. A politically negotiated settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan is the only way to achieve a sustainable peace and the only way to build an Afghanistan in which all citizens, regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity, can fully play their part and reach their full potential. Reaching such a settlement is more urgent than ever. We strongly encourage continued Afghan-owned and -led efforts towards unity and cooperation, along the lines of the negotiated deal with Hizb-i Islami. Increased political dialogue with other insurgent groups, including the Taliban, is now needed.

As pointed out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, regional tensions continue to undermine long-term stability and economic growth in Afghanistan. A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan would benefit the entire region. We call on all actors, not least Afghanistan's neighbours, to act constructively and responsibly for peace. We encourage the United Nations system — both on the ground and at Headquarters — to actively engage in activities and dialogue promoting regional cooperation and stability.

Finally, Sweden has consistently and significantly assisted Afghanistan for more than three decades. Our support for the people of Afghanistan remains firm, and we will continue to support them in their efforts towards a peaceful and stable society for all.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to reiterate France's condolences to the Afghan people and to the families of the victims of the attack committed 8 March in Kabul. France categorically condemns these acts, which seek to hinder Afghanistan's recovery and whose perpetrators must not go unpunished.

Allow me also warmly to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Tadamichi Yamamoto, and Ms. Sima Samar, for being with us today and for their briefings. France aligns itself in advance with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The National Unity Government is in the third year of its mandate, and its commitment and its efforts to ensure a democratic, stable and prosperous Afghanistan must be welcomed. The Brussels conference in October 2016 showed once again its determination to move forward with reforms, but also was a reminder that the international community was still standing by Afghanistan. France reiterates its full support to the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to

continue its efforts to promote the development and stabilization of the country.

Unfortunately, the continued deterioration of the security situation is extremely troubling, as reflected in the sad list of civilian casualties for 2016. Despite the brave efforts of the Afghan security forces with the support of international partners, attacks by the Taliban and Da'esh continue to unremittingly target the civilian population. On top of this already overwhelming human cost is another cost, which is the way in which the situation of insecurity weighs on the economic development of the country and its progress towards stability. We must not falter in our efforts to combat this violence and to protect civilians, especially women and children, as my Swedish colleague pointed out.

With respect to the security situation, it is all the more urgent that we relaunch our efforts for a peace process led by and for Afghans. The resumption of dialogue with the Taliban remains a crucial prospect. France therefore calls on all regional actors, in particular Pakistan, to use their influence to enable an end to the fighting and a resumption of peace negotiations. The establishment of a lasting peace in the country is our collective responsibility as well as that of all Afghan actors.

I turn now to the issue of drug trafficking, which has been fuelling the Taliban insurgency. It poses a threat to the health of the Afghan population and must continue to mobilize the Afghan Government. Here too, the Government can rely on the support of the international community in the implementation of its national plan of action, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which is providing valuable technical cooperation. A high level of ambition must at all costs be maintained on this subject as well as in combating corruption, since both are critical to bringing about positive changes in the field of development and security.

Finally, the spike in 2016 in the number of internally displaced persons and refugees also poses a major challenge. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189), the Afghan Government has committed to absorbing this flow as best it can. We therefore commend and encourage the coordination planned with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to respond to this migratory crisis, in particular to provide assistance to undocumented refugees, who are the most vulnerable group.

There is a still a long way to go in the transformation decade, but the course charted by the Afghan Government is the right one, as reflected in preparations for electoral reform and parliamentary elections. On this issue as well as on others, Afghanistan can rely on the full support of France and the international community. Renewing UNAMA's mandate, which is due in the coming days, will be further proof of this. In this still-fragile context, the full commitment of the United Nations in support of the Afghan Government is of crucial importance.

Let me conclude by commending the work done on the ground by all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, who are dealing with particularly difficult conditions, and we pay tribute to them all through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish at the outset, Mr. President, to thank you for having convened this debate on the issue of Afghanistan. China has listened attentively to the briefing delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and to the statements made by Ms. Samar of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations.

At present, Afghanistan is in a crucial state of transition. China commends the National Unity Government for its unremitting efforts in maintaining national stability, promoting national reconciliation and facilitating economic development. At the same time, the country is still facing grave challenges across the political, economic and security fields. In order to help Afghanistan respond to challenges, the international community must continue to provide firm support in the following areas.

First, it must vigorously improve the Afghan security situation. The international community must invest heavily in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces capacity-building, and enhance its self-defence capacity to effectively deal with the threats of terrorism, transnational crime and drug smuggling. General Assembly resolutions have confirmed the security cooperation between and among regional countries, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan. We hope that all parties concerned will continue to push it forward.

Secondly, it is important to steadfastly promote the national reconciliation process. Advancing the national

reconciliation process is the only way to ensure long-term peace in Afghanistan. All parties in Afghanistan must focus on the national interest and the people's interests and participate actively in the reconciliation process. The international community must fully support the inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process so that all parties can join the peace talks with fruitful results without further delay.

Thirdly, it is imperative to substantively assist Afghanistan in enhancing its governance capability. On issues concerning Afghanistan, it is the people of Afghanistan who have the final say. The international community must truly respect the right of the Afghan people independently to choose their political system and development path, and at the same time, on the basis of the national development strategy and specific needs, assist the Government in enhancing its administrative capability in a targeted way.

Fourthly, it must more effectively assist Afghanistan in its integration into regional development. The international community must make good on its commitment of assistance and support Afghanistan in its economic development. With resource endowments and geographical strength, Afghanistan enjoys broad prospects in regional economic cooperation.

General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have confirmed the great significance of the One Belt, One Road project to promote Afghan economic development and regional cooperation. It is our hope that all parties can jointly promote the One Belt, One Road project to enhance regional economic cooperation and connectivity, so as to assistancest Afghanistan in its social and economic development.

China commends the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its work. We laud UNAMA for its assistance to Afghanistan in maintaining national stability, promoting economic development and enhancing governance capability. We will continue to support the work of UNAMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto.

China and Afghanistan have been good friends and close neighbours for generations. China looks forward to the achievement of peace, security, stability and development. China will continue to support Afghanistan in enhancing its security capacity-building and in combating terrorism and will support the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as it plays an active part in that regard. China will continue to support the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and participate actively in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States of America, and other relevant mechanisms and processes.

China supports Afghanistan in its integration into regional cooperation. We will align our One Belt, One Road initiative with Afghanistan's National Development Strategy. Together with the international community, we will make concerted efforts towards the swift achievement of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as our colleague, Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for their briefings. I also thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, and his entire team for the excellent work they have been conducting at the helm of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) since January 2017.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains of concern, with deadly terrorist attacks like that carried out on 10 January in Kandahar, which killed 15 civilians, including six diplomats of the United Arab Emirates, and the attack carried out on 8 March — International Women's Day — on a military hospital in Kabul, claiming more than 40 victims. On behalf of my delegation, I take this opportunity to strongly condemn indiscriminate terrorist attacks that take the lives of thousands of innocent people. That tragedy serves to remind us that despite the progress made, in particular to promote political dialogue and national cohesion, the country still faces major political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges.

At the political level, we welcome efforts towards a rapprochement between the country's two leaders, President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah through constructive dialogue to improve their working relationship. Similarly, progress made in implementing the peace agreement between Hizb-international Islami (Gulbuddin) and the Government, as well as the launch of the electoral reform process and the good management and smooth functioning of upcoming elections, not to mention the Afghan

Government's efforts to combat drug trafficking with new legislation, should be welcomed. Nonetheless, we lament the lack of progress in the peace process between the Government and the Taliban, as it continues to have an adverse impact on the country's continually deteriorating security situation, in particular in provinces in the south, north and north-east of the country where fighting persists. In an environment of frequent terrorist attacks, we are reassured nonetheless by the presence and efforts of international forces fighting against terrorist groups, in particular the Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

The human rights and the humanitarian situations remain of concern due to ongoing insecurity, as reflected by the increase in the number of civilian victims, including women and children who continue to pay a high price. The return of refugees, in particular from Pakistan, including more than 650,000 additional internally displaced persons — a record number in 2016 — exacerbates a humanitarian situation that is already of concern in an economic environment that remains grim. The work of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations that continue to meet the needs of the needs of those people is remarkable.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Afghanistan requires additional support and solidarity from the international community. In that regard, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission that Ms. Samar so courageously and ably chairs deserves special support. With regard to regional cooperation, we welcome the improvement of relations between the Afghan Government and the Governments of neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, in the political, security and economic spheres.

In conclusion, once again, on behalf of the Senegalese delegation, I would like to offer congratulations and encouragement to the Afghan Government on its commendable efforts to combat corruption and impunity, as well as on its land tenure legislation and commitment to promoting gender equality and improving the status of women. I reiterate Senegal's support for the Permanent Representative and his team at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Once again, Senegal calls upon the international community to offer ongoing, multifaceted support, as illustrated at the 2016 Brussels Conference, and to remain committed to the stability and recovery of the great country that is Afghanistan. My delegation also supports the extension of the mandate of the Mission by one year so that it can build on its achievements and make further progress.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and I take this opportunity to voice support for his efforts. I also thank Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and His Excellency Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for their briefings.

I would like to thank you in particular, Sir, for that moment of silence because it reminds us that at times silence is more eloquent than words. In that regard, we reiterate our full commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, as well as to supporting its Government.

We acknowledge the ongoing resilience and commitment of the Afghan Government at this difficult time. We support the Government and people of Afghanistan in their fight against terrorism. We recognize that terrorism is a global threat and that the fight of various peoples — including the people of Afghanistan — against terrorism is everyone's fight. My delegation reiterates its firm support for the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan out of respect for its Constitution, non-violence and respect for the human rights of the Afghan people. We would also like to show our support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which continues to provide information on the situation and fulfil its mandate, in spite of the recurring political, security and economic challenges.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/189), the Afghan Government continues to face serious challenges. The report also underscores the ongoing gravity of the situation. The ongoing deterioration of the security situation is of concern. The number of security incidents stood at a record 23,702 in 2016. That figure, which is alarmingly high, translates to approximately 65 incidents per day or almost three per hour. Armed clashes between the security forces and the Taliban accounted for 63 per cent of the security incidents. We voice our concern about the presence and potential increase in the number of Da'esh affiliates in Afghanistan who are a serious threat to the security of Afghanistan and of countries in the region, including

those in Central Asia. We also reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Afghan national security and defence forces as they seek to combat these threats, as well as our support to the international partners of Afghanistan.

We are troubled by the continuous terrorist activity in the region. On 8 March a terrorist attack perpetrated by local affiliates of Da'esh took place in Kabul, resulting in more than 120 victims — including the dead and the injured. Already in 2017 we have had the 10 January attack in Kabul, which also resulted in more than 120 dead or injured, and the suicide attack in Helmand, in which over 13 people were killed. That is in addition to the 7 February attack on the Supreme Court in Kabul, which resulted in at least 21 dead and more than 40 wounded.

We are also concerned about the plight of civilian victims, in particular children and women. There have been reports of a 24 per cent increase — in comparison to 2016 — with regard to violence against children. Moreover, violence against women is still frequent, as seen in the attacks against women in their places of work. The humanitarian situation, as pointed out in the report, is quite troubling. We call upon the international media to refrain from either ignoring this or engaging in double standards when talking about the havoc wrought by terrorism. The world must be aware and continually reminded of the sacrifices of the Afghan people in combating these global threats.

The commitments of the international community made during various conferences to provide assistance in terms of security and development to the people and Government of Afghanistan, including the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan and the recent Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process, transformed political will into concrete initiatives intended to promote the stabilization and reform efforts incorporated in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework.

We express our support for the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat drug trafficking, which continues to serve as a significant source of financing for terrorist groups. In that regard, the international community needs to take more decisive action with respect to tax havens, which serve as a means to introduce money from drug trafficking into the international financial system.

We welcome the 21 January launch by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations of the humanitarian response plan for $550 million, with a view to meeting the critical humanitarian needs of 5.7 million people.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the need to promote greater socioeconomic development as a necessity to the achievement of lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. In that vein, we welcome initiatives aimed at promoting close cooperation between Afghanistan, regional associations and the international community. Lastly, we remain convinced that the United Nations, with full respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan, will continue to play a key role, contributing to the realization of the aspirations of Afghanistan to achieve national unity and lasting stability.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, which was based on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189).

I should like to underline the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) last year. In 2016, we bore witness to many developments, which the Mission addressed positively. We therefore look forward to working with other Council members in the next few days to extend the mandate of UNAMA for a further 12 months.

We also wish to congratulate the Afghan Government on the major efforts it has undertaken in the face of grave challenges, in particular the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the troubling consequences for women and children. In that vein, we urge the international community, and UNAMA in particular, to make further efforts to mediate between the Government and the Taliban in order to end the cycle of violence and conflict between them.

We also encourage the Afghan Government to reach internal agreements. In that regard, we appreciate the latest achievements with regard to the establishment of a consultative mechanism on high-level Government posts and power-sharing. We also support the efforts of the Government to complete the organizational bases for elections in order to hold parliamentary elections as soon as possible. As for the efforts of the Government to combat corruption, we believe that the creation of the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is a step on the right

path. We encourage further steps to achieve justice and to draw in further foreign investments.

Egypt strongly condemns the barbaric acts of terrorism that have been committed in Afghanistan over the past few months. We express our concern at the exponential rise in such attacks during the past year. We condemn in particular the barbaric acts against a major hospital in Kabul yesterday.

Allow me to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of combatting and uprooting Da'esh in the context of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We also stress that the narcotics trade is a threat to stability and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole. Moreover, we express our concern at the increase in opium production in 2016, in addition to the exponential increase in the production of synthetic drugs. We stress the importance of close regional and international coordination with the Afghan authorities with a view to combating the narcotics trade, including by addressing the issue of illegal money transfers. That cannot be separated from the efforts to combat terrorism because drugs are one of the main sources of funding for armed militias and terrorist groups.

Egypt appreciates fully its historic and traditional ties with Afghanistan. We also appreciate the repercussions the security situation there has on stability in both Central Asia and the Middle East, and we support the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat terrorism. We support the efforts of the Afghan authorities to develop programmes aimed at increasing the prosperity of the Afghan people.

In conclusion, Egypt reiterates its full support for Afghanistan. We also appreciate that country's need to improve its capabilities so that it can overcome these important obstacles and achieve stability, peace, security and sustainable development.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank Ms. Samar, Mr. Yamamoto and our colleague Ambassador Saikal for their respective statements.

I must first of all refer to the brutal terrorist attack committed on Wednesday in Kabul against a medical facility and reiterate on this occasion our condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan. Uruguay categorically condemns this and all terrorist attacks. We are troubled by the increasing frequency of indiscriminate attacks against medical facilities. We call for full compliance with resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the sick and wounded, and of medical personnel and facilities. Moreover, we recall that attacks on hospitals and medical personnel are a violation of international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes. We insist that those crimes not go unpunished and that the perpetrators be brought to account.

Uruguay supports the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and endorses the recommendation of the Secretary-General to extend its mandate by a further year. My delegation is troubled by the deteriorating security conditions in the country, which have been described by the Secretary-General as the worst since the deployment of UNAMA. In 2016, we saw the highest number of victims in a single year since 2009. We are also troubled by the lack of progress made toward peace between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, a group that has increased its activities, as well as its influence over part of the Afghan territory.

The United Nations and the international community must maintain their support for Afghanistan, given the long road that still lies ahead in restoring and consolidating lasting peace and in rebuilding the country. The strengthening of democratic institutions is a priority in order to achieve stability. I therefore wish to highlight the progress made in the electoral process, the preparation of next year's parliamentary elections and the Government's efforts in the fight against corruption.

While the strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020, adopted by the Government, is a positive step, we are concerned that a joint commission comprising members of the lower and upper houses of the National Assembly approved a revised text of the law on the elimination of harassment against women and children. The plan awaits implementation and presidential approval.

The situation of human rights in Afghanistan has deterioated over the past year. As ever, girls and children suffer disproportionate violence in conflicts. During the September 2016 debate on Afghanistan (see S/PV.7771), my delegation made a reference to the practice of child marriage and to the need to adopt new legislation to prevent such practices. We welcome the recent news that this practice has finally been criminalized in Afghan legislation. What will be much harder is to enforce the law and, most important of

all, to make it a cultural blueprint for condemning the practice as aberrant.

Uruguay encourages the Government of Afghanistan to pursue reconciliation, acting with leadership to overcome short-, medium- and long-term challenges and making the reforms necessary for the reconstruction of the country in a climate of peace, security and economic development.

In conclusion, we reiterate our thanks to all United Nations personnel and all those involved in the provision of humanitarian aid in the country, who continue to work despite extremely difficult conditions and being subject to frequent attacks.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, as well his for the commitment and contribution of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to peace and security in Afghanistan.

We also thank Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for her briefing, firmly calling for the protection of women's rights and their wider engagement in Afghanistan's development.

We also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

As a State of the region, Kazakhstan takes to heart all the issues regarding the development of Afghanistan and is genuinely interested in its stable, secure and prosperous development. Kazakhstan commends the Afghan leadership for its continued efforts to ensure more effective coordination and proactive engagement with the opposition political parties within the country in order to find common ground on critical issues the country faces. We encourage the recently established Independent Election Commission to introduce new reforms to ensure successful impartial parliamentary and regional elections.

Our delegation highly appreciates the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to the peace process and calls on all interested sides within and outside the country to exert every effort to support it. We recognize that the political process in Afghanistan is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. At the same time, Kazakhstan welcomes multilateral engagement at the regional level and supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the role of regional countries remains vital to any political process.

We are concerned about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which remains unstable and fragile because of well-known international terrorist organizations — not home-grown, as stated by our Afghan colleague — operating out of that country and posing serious security threats to Afghanistan itself and the countries of the region, including Central Asian States. Kazakhstan underlines that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization constantly address the situation in Afghanistan. We commend the work of the NATO-led mission and the efforts of a number of countries to train the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and reform the security sectors of the army and police.

The increase in poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan poses another big threat to security. We need to combat this scourge and support the coordinated measures taken by Government of Afghanistan, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and INTERPOL. The Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors, located in Almaty, plays important role, and we encourage closer cooperation among the countries of origin, transit and destination in that regard.

The armed conflict has resulted in a grave humanitarian situation, with increased numbers of deaths of civilians. Kazakhstan is particularly concerned that the destruction of hospitals and schools has continued. All these violations of international humanitarian law must be prohibited, prosecuted and condemned.

We need to support UNAMA's assistance to the Government in promoting human rights and taking care of the influx of refugees into Afghanistan, as well as in launching the proposed national countering violent extremism strategy for Afghanistan. Kazakhstan provides assistance to Afghanistan by sponsoring the education of 1,000 Afghan students and providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Afghan citizens. Kazakhstan and Japan have launched a project that focuses on human rights and the economic independence of Afghan women.

Regional trade and economic and transit-transport cooperation are critical to the economic revival of

Afghanistan. Countering terrorism will not be effective unless we properly address the issues of development. My country therefore proposes the establishment of a United Nations regional centre in Almaty, which already hosts 18 United Nations regional and subregional offices. The centre would promote development, disaster risk-reduction and resilience-building, and coordinate cost-effective humanitarian aid from the United Nations.

We support the development strategy of the One Belt-One Road initiative, as proposed by China, which could bring economic growth and prosperity to our part of the world. Kazakhstan will continue to contribute to bilateral, regional and multilateral action for the recovery, stability, peace and progress of Afghanistan.

Finally, the work of UNAMA is acknowledged as indispensable to these objectives. Its presence, its achievements and successes are necessary in Afghanistan. We support the extension of its mandate for another year.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and for the work of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in supporting the restoration of peace, reconciliation and development in Afghanistan.

I also thank Ambassador Saikal and Ms. Samar for being with us here today.

The United States joins in the strong condemnation of the deadly attack on an Afghan National Army hospital in Kabul on 8 March. Deliberately targeting a medical facility that provides care for the brave Afghans working to protect their fellow citizens has no possible justification. We extend our deepest and most heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of the victims of that senseless and cowardly act.

Since we last met to discuss Afghanistan in December (see S/PV.7844), we have been encouraged by progress towards the goal that we all share of ensuring a secure, inclusive and democratic Afghanistan for all Afghan people. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah continue to work together to strengthen the National Unity Government, establish mechanisms for determining Government appointments, and combat corruption. Election reform is making steady progress, as demonstrated by the transparent and consultative process to select and install commissioners, as well as President Ghani's appointment of Mohammad Warimach as Chief Electoral Officer on 1 March.

We commend the Afghan Government for its continued commitment to an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process, in spite of the continuing attacks. The progress made in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami gives us hope for similar progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict with the Taliban. The United States calls upon the Taliban to enter into negotiations with the Afghan Government. We also call on Afghanistan's neighbours and the international community to increase pressure on the Taliban to come to the table for talks with the Afghan Government. A political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government remains the best way to end violence and to bring stability to the region.

However, despite those positive developments, Afghanistan continues to face challenges that would test even the strongest Government. Regrettably, those challenges are not new; we have discussed them repeatedly in the Council. But they are within the power of Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community to address. The Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other armed groups are increasing their attacks, resulting in the death and injury of thousands of Afghans and delaying the progress that Afghanistan so badly needs. The internal displacement of citizens fleeing insecurity presents a humanitarian challenge that is exacerbated by the return of more than 850,000 refugees and undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries. And while development assistance remains robust, a precipitous decrease in domestic and foreign investment has stalled the private-sector-led growth that Afghanistan requires to employ its youth, reduce poverty and provide hope to communities.

In that challenging environment, UNAMA is an essential partner for the people and the Government of Afghanistan and for the international community. The United States therefore strongly supports the renewal of UNAMA's mandate for an additional year. UNAMA plays a critical role in supporting peace and reconciliation, empowering women's voices, defending the human rights of all Afghan citizens and coordinating humanitarian assistance. I also want to highlight that UNAMA's 12 provincial offices are in many places the only permanent international presence outside of Kabul. Those offices are critical in engaging Afghan

citizens outside of the capital as well. In conclusion, we look forward to working with all members on finding ways to maximize UNAMA's very important efforts.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing, as well as to express our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all United Nations agencies in supporting Afghanistan and coordinating the international community's assistance to that country. Our special thanks go to Ms. Sima Samar, the first woman to brief the Security Council on Afghanistan.

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be made later today on behalf of the European Union, I would like to raise several points in my national capacity.

Ukraine remains committed to supporting the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led national reconciliation process aimed at bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan. We commend the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners in creating an environment conducive to overcoming the stalemate in the peace negotiations and reaching a sustainable resolution of the decades-long conflict in the country.

Yet there can be no tangible progress towards stabilization without the readiness of other regional players to set aside differences and to exert influence on Taliban leaders by denying them shelter and forcing that terrorist group to renounce aggression against Afghanistan. As reported by UNAMA, the situation remains tense. The Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and their affiliates continue to maintain their presence in certain parts of Afghanistan. Their armed assaults and recurring suicide attacks continue to claim a high death toll and to have an adverse impact on the country's political, economic and security situation.

We are concerned about the acts of violence and attacks against diplomatic missions and their personnel, as well as humanitarian and medical facilities, which impede international efforts to aid the people of Afghanistan. We are also alarmed by the continued flagrant violations of human rights, maltreatment of the civilian population, summary executions, deliberate abuses and continuing discrimination against women and girls, as well as the use of child soldiers on the territories under Taliban and other terrorist groups' control. In that regard, putting the current Taliban leadership under increased pressure takes on additional importance. We believe that can be an effective tool in persuading them to earnestly participate in peace negotiations.

A successful example of such practice is the peace deal signed with Hizb-i Islami, which greatly contributed to the restoration of normal life in the territories under the control of that group. We call on the Government of Afghanistan to continue the implementation of the agreement in order to build upon achieved results.

We also commend the Afghan Government for implementing its commitments to fight corruption, which hinders the country's development, while also promoting good governance, the rule of law and human rights, continuing electoral reform and strengthening coordination between security forces and law-enforcement agencies to ensure that they can effectively tackle existing security threats.

Cooperation with relevant international financial and trade organizations, as well as regional forums such as the Heart of Asia and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, should continue so as to further the implementation of the Government's economic reform agenda.

The implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security is also of paramount importance for the sake of creating a stable future for the country by eradicating gender-based violence and elevating women as full and equal partners. We also believe that women's voices have to be included in peace and security decision-making, particularly given the sustained violence against Afghan women leaders and human rights defenders. We ask UNAMA to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan in promoting the standards I mentioned while fulfilling the respective national action plan.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his detailed briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We actively support his work and that of his highly professional team in Afghanistan and of the Secretariat. We are prepared to extend the mandate of his operation, with just a few slight changes.

We listened with interest to the statement made by Ms. Samar, as we did to the one by Mr. Saikal. I want to say at the very outset that, for Russia, Afghanistan

has always been, and remains, a friendly country, one which today is undergoing difficult times.

We once again reiterate our condolences to the people and the Government of Afghanistan for the victims of the deadly terrorist attacks. We earlier stated our solidarity with our diplomat colleagues from the United Arab Emirates, who were also killed as a result of dastardly terrorist attacks.

We are worried at seeing how things are developing in Afghanistan. We are concerned by the deterioration of the security situation and the surge in terrorist activity over the past few months. The negative trends we are seeing are hampering regional and international efforts to resolve problems in Afghanistan and bring about sustainable development. Civilians are increasingly suffering from the violence. In 2016, the number of peaceful Afghan civilian victims and of people dying as a result of military action or terrorist attacks reached an alarming level of 11,500 victims. We need urgent measures in order to stop those dangerous trends.

We must be honest in recognizing that many issues facing the international military presence have gone unresolved in the past 15 years. We say that not to point the finger at any one, allocate blame or distract attention. We mention it so that everyone realizes that the goal of a resolution in Afghanistan requires the consolidation of regional and international efforts. Only by working together can we address the entire host of built-up complex problems, of which unfortunately there are many.

We are particularly concerned about the growth of the Islamic State and its aspirations to absorb other elements of the armed opposition. The strengthening of that group has been demonstrated by the attack on the hospital in Kabul on 8 March, resulting in numerous victims. We believe that approximately 3,500 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham are operating within the country. Given all the sympathizers and sleeping cells, a much higher number may be more realistic. The main theatres of operation are centred in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Helmand, Kandahar, Faryab, Baghlan and Kunduz. We therefore call on everyone to devote increased attention to that problem and not attempt to ignore it.

A serious threat to the stability of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, our friends in Central Asia, is generated from the drug problem. We are concerned that, once again, in 2016 there was a surge in poppy cultivation. The increase in drug revenue will inevitably further fuel terrorist activities. We therefore believe that it is necessary to step up international efforts towards combating Afghan drug trafficking. We deem that efforts to assist Afghanistan in that regard need to proceed through using tried and tested regional structures such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We see much potential in strengthening counter-terrorist and counter-narcotics cooperation between Afghanistan and those entities.

We support the Afghan Government's policy aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We are ready to provide assistance to advancing the negotiation process, including flexibly approaching the issue of the possibility of easing the sanctions regime of the relevant sanctions committees with regard to Afghanistan, provided that it does run contrary to the national interests of the country. The main priority of national reconciliation is to bring on board the Taliban in the framework of peace talks. That matter remains to be resolved. We need the harmonization of approaches and the synchronization of all the stakeholders including for collectively combating terrorism.

We take note of the positive potential of Kazakhstan's initiatives. A fundamental response to the challenges that we face involves establishing genuine good-neighbourly relations in the region. The Taliban movement must join the national reconciliation process with Kabul playing the lead, based on the three well-known and approved United Nations principles: recognizing the Constitution of Afghanistan, disarmament and cutting off ties with Al-Qaida, the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations.

Ensuring stability in Afghanistan must lie with the national security forces. Russia has provided Afghanistan free of charge a large provision of weapons and ammunition. We are training Afghan personnel in relevant Russian education institutions. Russia is playing an active role in combating terrorism in Afghanistan. We intend to help Kabul establish its army and police. In order to reinvigorate the settlement process in Afghanistan, Moscow decided to intensify efforts towards developing a single regional approach aimed at promoting the process of national reconciliation. To address that issue, on 27 December 2016 we convened a meeting with China and Pakistan in Moscow and continued with the same format on 15 February with Afghanistan, Iran and India. During

the next phase of that process, we believe that it would be important and timelyto involve our Central Asian partners as well as the United States.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and for all of his and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) work in Afghanistan. He has the United Kingdom's continued and full support. I also want to pay particular tribute to Ms. Samar, who is not only the first briefer from civil society of our presidency, but also the first-ever civil society briefer from Afghanistan to speak before the Security Council. It has taken 37 years of Afghanistan being on our agenda for this day to become a reality, and I look to future presidencies to make sure that it does not take another 37 years for it to happen again.

As so much has already been said about the situation in Afghanistan, I am going to focus on just two core issues: the need to reduce the violence, and the ongoing priority of human rights. The recent abhorrent attacks underscore the pressing, immediate need for us all to work together to end the violence. The people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long. The human cost has simply been too high, and now, more than ever, a coordinated response is needed from the Afghan Government and society, the region and the international community. As we know all too well, the violence will only increase in the coming weeks as the winter weather retreats across most of the country. We must focus on achieving meaningful steps from all sides. That means tackling the terrorist sanctuaries, their funding and logistical support.

I want to pay tribute to the continued sacrifice of the Afghan security forces as they perform that dangerous and unrelenting task. They have the United Kingdom's full support. As the coalition's lead on the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, we are proud to help train the next generation of Afghanistan's military leaders.

Secondly, we must not lose focus on the pressing need to sustain progress on human rights in Afghanistan, as Ms. Samar so eloquently made clear. The human rights situation today is unrecognizable from that of 2001. Women now hold 28 per cent of parliamentary seats, which was something unthinkable under Taliban rule. For comparison's sake, in the United Kingdom that statistic is 29 per cent. Seven million children are now attending school, of whom more than 3 million are girls. Legislation protecting the rights of the marginalized is in now in place, and Afghanistan's new Anti-Corruption Justice Centre held its first trial late last year in a fair and transparent manner. Those are significant steps. However, as we look to the future of Afghanistan, we should recognize that being better than 2001 is not the benchmark to which to aspire.

We need to help Afghanistan build on the steps taken so far so that all Afghans can enjoy an even safer and more prosperous future in which human rights are a given and not in question. The United Kingdom is doing its part to ensure progress on a broad range of human rights challenges. We are helping increase women's social, economic and political participation and supporting the Government of Afghanistan to reform its electoral system in order to improve the transparency and credibility of elections. We are helping fund institutions that empower Afghans to develop human rights monitoring capabilities, and we are providing training in international humanitarian law to combat abuses. We are doing so because the United Kingdom remains committed to helping the National Unity Government realize its constitutional and international human rights obligations. We will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan, local and international non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and international partners to help make that a reality.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I thank the representatives of members of the Security Council for respecting the time limit, and I respectfully remind future speakers of the need to conclude their remarks within five minutes. If necessary, after the light begins to flash, I will use the gavel to stake the time.

I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): To begin, let me also thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, and the representatives of Afghanistan who are present here at the table.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

In his report (S/2017/189), the Secretary-General highlights some encouraging political developments. Germany welcomes the peace agreement with

Hezb-i-Islami and the first steps taken in its implementation. Successful implementation will be crucial in convincing other militant groups that lasting peace is possible in Afghanistan. The precondition, of course, is that they be willing to pursue their objectives through political means, cut ties to international terrorism and respect the universal human rights enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. I would like to commend the National Unity Government for keeping its doors open to peace negotiations with the Taliban. A comprehensive peace and reconciliation process remains the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Furthermore, like you, Mr. President, we are encouraged by the progress made in electoral reform, and particularly the nomination of a Chief Electoral Officer on 1 March. Afghanistan now has the necessary institutions in place to hold parliamentary and district council elections. Next, a clear and realistic timetable needs to be established for the remaining electoral reforms and for credible, fair, equal and free elections.

The fragile security situation remains the main challenge in Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the number of armed clashes rose by 5 per cent, the number of civilian casualties continued to rise and the number of child casualties increased by 24 per cent. This is far too much. While the vast majority of those casualties are caused by non-State actors, the Government can do more to protect, in particularly children.

As the Secretary-General also reports, the targeting of health services and health-care workers also continued. Just two days ago, we witnessed the horrible attack on a military hospital in Kabul. On this occasion, we offer our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan people. Sadly, this tragedy has served to underline once more the findings of a report entitled *Every Clinic is Now on the Frontline*, presented by the non-governmental organization Watchlist at an event that Germany co-hosted on 6 March in New York. Children suffer in particular from a lack of access to medical treatment. Germany will continue to raise awareness about the suffering of this most vulnerable group of victims in its capacity as Chair of the local Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

As reported, 1.5 million Afghan individuals were displaced internally or returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries in 2016. The Government of Afghanistan will require substantial help from the international community to deal with that situation. Germany remains committed to supporting the Afghan Government's efforts towards a sustainable reintegration of the returning refugees and internally displaced persons.

We are currently finalizing financial assistance agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, and we encourage all Member States to join us in this endeavour. At the same time, we call upon all parties to ensure that the return of refugees is conducted in a dignified manner and takes into account the absorption capacity of Afghanistan.

Let me conclude by reiterating Germany's full support for the continued important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. As co-Chair of the International Contact Group for Afghanistan, Germany especially commends UNAMA's efforts to strengthen cohesion among international and regional stakeholders for promoting peace in Afghanistan. It is very important, therefore, to renew the UNAMA mandate without further delay. We welcome the strategic review of the Mission, which the Security Council intends to request. The review should be conducted in the spirit of optimizing ongoing activities and strengthening the Mission even further.

Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/189), and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and Ms. Samar for their briefings this morning.

We reject the baseless allegations made against us by Afghanistan's representative this morning. His Government would do better to deal with its vast challenges than to externalize internal problems. The Government of Afghanistan [NOTE: speaker said "Pakistan" but appears to have meant "Afghanistan" has consumed hundreds of billions of dollars of international assistance, and what it has to show for it is reflected

in the Secretary-General's report. The report observes that there has been no significant improvement in the political, security or economic situation in Afghanistan; attacks by insurgent groups have intensified; economic opportunity remains absent; the reconciliation process has stalled; and the confluence of these factors has magnified the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and threatens regional peace and security. It is indeed threatening the peace and security of my own country.

Shifting the blame to my country will not help the Afghan Government shroud its own failures. It is Afghanistan that has failed to end its wars and internal strife and, as a result, has undermined the security of the entire region. This forum should not be misused for gratuitous sermons; it should be utilized for problem-solving and finding solutions. Peace in Afghanistan is in Pakistan's own vital interest. It is one of my Government's top priorities, but we wonder if this aspiration is shared by some of our regional partners.

Pakistan has paid a staggering human and financial cost for the conflict in Afghanistan, yet the resilience of our proud people and the remarkable success of our military and law-enforcement measures have successfully broken the back of terrorist outfits. It was only possible due to indiscriminate targeting of all terrorist groups. But instead of cooperation and appreciation and applying a similar squeeze on its side of the border, we have heard complaints that our strong action was pushing terrorists into Afghanistan. The fact is that terrorists found safe haven in Aghanistan because of conducive conditions and weak border management. But instead of blaming Afghanistan, Pakistan invited Afghanistan time and again to talk about border management. We proposed a number of border standard operating procedures two years ago. They are still awaiting finalization.

Afghanistan's only response thus far has been sheer indifference and in some cases facilitation of the continued use of Afghan territory for launching attacks in Pakistan, killing and maming hundreds of innocent civilians, including women and children. Yet we prefered restraint over escalation, cooperation over confrontation and dialogue over conflict. And we have been exercising maximum restraint in the face of provocations by terrorists from across the Pakistan border. We were forced to close our border temporarily to secure our territory from the terrorists who reorganized in Afghanistan and launched terrorism against us. Yet, on purely humanitarian grounds, we reopened the border temporarily, risking our own security to alleviate the sufferings of the Afghan people.

There are multiple factors, both military and non-military, that have contributed to the existing stalemate in Afghanistan. Singling out Pakistan and pinning the blame on it for everything that goes wrong in Afghanistan is neither fair nor accurate. Pakistan has consistently called for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, but such a settlement remains the responsibility of the parties to the conflict. There has been strong international consensus supporting this solution. We engaged sincerely in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which as a mechanism can still be utilized, but we should remembered who sabotaged this process not once but twice. Therefore, if one wants to blame someone for not being sincere, it is definitely not us.

Pakistan remains fully committed to voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. Today, as countries close their borders to refugees, the international community, and in particular Afghanistan itself, should be able to fathom the depths of our generosity in hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees for almost 40 years.

Last week in Islamabad, Pakistan hosted the thirteenth Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization in a reiteration of our commitment to a peaceful neighbourhood. In Islamabad we jointly recommitted to transforming the region into a zone of peace and collective prosperity, and to facing regional challenges, including terrorism and drug-trafficking, together. One Belt, One Road is an example of other such initiatives that can have positive effects on promoting development and prosperity, and therefore peace, in the region. Pakistan remains committed to those ideals, and we hope that our partners will share in them with the same zeal. We can make the region a centre of peace, progress and prosperity, but we can only do it together.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/189), Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Saikal and Ms. Samar for their statements.

At the outset, I would like to express in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of the heinous attack

that targeted a hospital in Kabul earlier this week, which claimed many innocent lives and maimed many others. We offer our condolences to the brotherly Government and the people of Afghanistan and wish the wounded a speedy recovery. We would also like to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Kabul on the deaths of five of his compatriots and fellow diplomats, who lost their lives as a consequence of the terrorist attack perpetrated in Kandahar in January. I would once again like to emphasize that Turkey will continue its support to the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and its efforts to bring peace and stability to the country.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, which highlights the achievements and provides guidelines for the future efforts and responsibilities of both Afghanistan and the international community. We commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating international stakeholders' efforts there, and we will continue to support those activities and efforts. In that understanding, we look forward to the Security Council's upcoming adoption of a draft resolution renewing UNAMA's mandate.

The achievements of the past 15 years in Afghanistan must be sustained and enhanced. The international community's continued support during the transformation decade is therefore extremely important. We were pleased to see the international community reiterate its support to Afghanistan at the Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference, and that it is keeping up with its commitments to Afghanistan. Turkey has maintained its previous level of development contributions and has pledged another $150 million for the years from 2018 to 2020. We are also providing $60 million to help sustain the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for the same period, in line with the NATO Warsaw Summit decisions. We will continue to support the Afghan Government's security and development efforts both bilaterally and on multilateral platforms. In that context, we will continue the support we give through the NATO Resolute Support Mission and through our training of Afghan women police officers in Turkey.

Because the National Unity Government symbolizes Afghan unity, we consider its functions important. The international community should continue to support it and encourage its components to work in harmony with one another.

As the report of the Secretary-General reflects, the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan is a source of serious concern. We applaud the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their determined fight against terrorism. The presence of Da'esh on Afghan soil, as mentioned in the report, is another source of grave concern and another reason why we must continue to support Afghanistan. Lasting peace in the country can be achieved only through a successful conclusion to the national peace and reconciliation process. We hope that the agreement between the Government and Hizb-i-Islami will serve as a model for others. We will maintain our support to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts.

Last but not least, we believe that enhancing the dialogue among the countries of the region is particularly important. In that regard, Turkey will continue its contributions to Afghanistan within the multilateral platforms, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mrs. Gregoire-Van-Haaren (Netherlands): I thank you for this opportunity to speak in this debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. President.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2017/189). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar for their briefings.

Today I will focus on three issues — reconciliation and regional cooperation, the security and humanitarian situation, and the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Reconciliation is key to achieving a truly stable Afghanistan and, to that end, the countries of the region have a critical and positive role to play in support of Afghanistan. A regional approach is crucial to achieving structural security and stability, and requires all partners to be genuinely engaged and working together. However, the peace process should be Afghan-led and

Afghan-owned. Moreover, the meaningful participation of women in any peace process remains essential to achieving durable and inclusive peace. President Ghani has stated that peace talks are a clear objective for the Afghan Government. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the peace deal that has been reached between the Government and Hizb-i-Islami and considers it to be an important step in the reconciliation process. We hope for its smooth implementation so that the deal can function as an encouragement to other insurgency groups, such as the Taliban, to abandon violence and engage seriously in peace talks.

In the past few months, unfortunately, the armed clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban have continued. Only two days ago, an attack in Kabul for which local affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility left more than 120 people killed or injured, and I would like to express my condolences to Ambassador Saikal in that regard. While we commend the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) for their continued efforts to counter the Taliban and other insurgents, international support remains necessary. The international community, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has supported the ANDSF for more than a decade now, and we continue to do so through our contribution to the Resolute Support Mission.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is particularly concerned about children's disproportionate suffering in the deteriorating security situation, as well as about the steep rise in the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Afghanistan's limited capacity to absorb the vast increase in IDPs and returnees has the potential to lead to growing numbers with no prospects of steady jobs or incomes and at risk of joining insurgency groups. In response to last year's United Nations flash appeal, the Netherlands contributed €4.5 million to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands commends UNAMA for its role in supporting the Afghan Government in fulfilling its commitments in the area of reform, and we therefore support the continuation of its mandate. We would particularly like to emphasize our appreciation for its coordinating efforts among international partners, as well as the thorough UNAMA human rights reports. As Ms. Samar just underlined, while much progress has been made in recent years, human rights, including women's rights, continue to be a matter for significant concern in Afghanistan, and we applaud United Nations efforts to work with the Afghan Government and civil society in enhancing the position of women there. We would like to emphasize our appreciation for the broad United Nations presence throughout the country and to stress how important we believe it is to ensure that UNAMA continues to operate throughout Afghanistan rather than retreating to Kabul alone. A presence in the field is crucial to the Mission's success.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan and has contributed significant aid to it in the areas of peace, justice and development. At the Brussels Conference on 5 October, our Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation pledged €230 million to continue our support for Afghanistan's reconstruction. In that spirit of partnership, the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade, a decade of increasing Afghan ownership and leadership.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the insightful and frank briefings by Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar, which have added to our understanding of the current circumstances.

The unimpeded and increasingly brutal terrorist attacks, the territorial gains by terrorist groups with support from outside Afghanistan and the emerging grave humanitarian crises are all portents of dreadful times. The recent terrorist attack on Afghanistan's largest hospital in Kabul poignantly depicts the very complexity of the problems faced by Afghans as a people, in the most graphic manner. Afghanistan, a wounded nation reeling with multiple injuries — in dire need of healing and at its most vulnerable — was attacked in the most gruesome manner by disguised attackers who target caregivers.

In the past few months, terrorism in Afghanistan has grown enormously in intensity, brutality and scope. Terrorist groups have been successful in their efforts to capture and hold territory. The Taliban has tried to expand its influence to territories in the north and northeast, and to the southwest where it has traditionally

not been so strong. The nexus between terrorist networks and criminal groups has further strengthened.

We salute the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, who are countering the forces of terrorism and extremism with courage and resilience. India remains committed to standing with Afghanistan and supporting and strengthening its capabilities to fight terrorism and violence. Even as the international community pours in resources and efforts to support that wounded nation, steadfast efforts to ensure that the support can be absorbed and utilized by Afghanistan are crucial. In that regard, it is our first and foremost duty to ensure that the resurgent forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries or safe havens of any shape or form. Experience shows that situations in which foreign assistance is available to insurgents tend to fester and take a greater toll. We also must not differentiate between good and bad terrorists or play one group against the other. The Taliban, the Haqqani network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and others of their ilk are all terror organizations — many of them proscribed by the United Nations. They should be treated as such and their activities must be universally opposed.

It is obvious that the political process that the United Nations started and the sanctions regimes that the Council had split have not quite worked. The fact that the Council has not taken action against the Taliban leaders, as it had vowed in resolution 1988 (2011), is now well documented. It took the subsidiary body of the Council four months to confirm the death of the Taliban's former leader. Seven months later, we still await the decision of the Council's same subsidiary body regarding the freezing of that slain terrorist's accounts.

Even as the democratically elected Government of Afghanistan battles against terror, it is being saddled with mounting problems that are not of its making. We are seeing a paradoxical phenomenon of the return of almost a million Afghans to their homeland, many involuntarily, in the most difficult security and economic situation the country has witnessed. As if all this were not enough, the landlocked country's access to the high seas is becoming an issue of contention.

The collective humanitarian impact of all this is staggering, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189) and by the briefers today. Has the trend of reversing of the gains of the international community and Afghan people in the last decades perhaps now started? Can all of us, who have invested so much in support of the Afghan people, remain watching on the sidelines? Can we simply look on as territories are captured by terrorists, people are killed or forced, under threat, to go back to a situation that is the same or worse than the one they fled? Here and now, it is imperative that we take decisive action. We must not forget the implications the world faced in 2001 for its lack of action. History never forgives those who forget it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to the United Kingdom for having organized this debate and to the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement, as well as to Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Samar.

I express our deepest sympathies and condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan over the two most recent terrorist attacks on 1 and 8 March, carried out by the Taliban and Da'esh, respectively.

According to the latest Secretary-General report (S/2017/189), the overall security situation continued to worsen throughout 2016 and into 2017 with 23,700 security incidents — an increase of nearly 5 per cent compared to 2015 and the highest number ever recorded by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). At the same time, we note that the number of such incidents in 2015 — an increase of 22 percent over 2014 — was the highest level since the United Nations started recording security incidents. This has been a very disturbing trend since 2001.

Today, the Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism. The sustained support of the international community is needed more than ever to support the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as to address its security, political, economic and development challenges.

In my previous statements, I warned about the emergence of Da'esh and its affiliates in Afghanistan. The terrorist attack on 23 July and the most recent organized terrorist attack on the Kabul hospital last Wednesday, 8 March, are clear indications concerning that emerging security threat for Afghanistan and the region.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting; we stand ready to work constructively with the Afghan authorities. We welcome any Government progress towards peace and hope that an Afghan-owned and -led peace process brings about lasting and comprehensive peace in the country and the region. Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour, since security in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affects security at our borders and in the region.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace and economic development and stability in the region. The trilateral Chabahar agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan on the development of the Chabahar port, which gives Afghanistan access to world markets through the open seas, and the Khaf-Herat railway are two major transit projects under way. Those projects have the capacity to change the regional economic prospects of Afghanistan. We invite all interested regional actors to consider participating in them.

For the past 37 years, Iran hosted no less than 3 million Afghan nationals at any given point. They have access to most of the subsidized services available to Iranian nationals, including basic commodities, public transportation, public health and public education. We continue to provide them with social services and educate nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students with minimum burden-sharing assistance from the international community.

Repatriation of Afghans from Iran remains steady but continues to represent the lowest recorded returnee rate since the establishment of the voluntary return programme in 2002. We welcome all efforts aimed at helping to overcome the main reintegration challenges faced by returnees and to formulate a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy. Success in voluntary repatriation depends first and foremost on providing for the basic needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan, which underscores the need for greater international support. A stronger, coordinated approach between the Government, donors and the United Nations, and an overall strategy for addressing the combined needs of displaced persons and returnees are crucial in order to make the repatriation of Afghan refugees more successful.

In conclusion, we support UNAMA as well as United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment by the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as set forth in the final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the resolve of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their support for the fraternal people and Government of Afghanistan as they move through this difficult period of their history towards a stable, safe and prosperous Afghanistan, and on the eve of their New Year, I wish them a happy Nowruz.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

Due to time constraints, I shall read out a slightly shorter version of my statement. The full version, as agreed, has been distributed in the Chamber.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/189). I thank also the Special Representative and Ms. Samar for their briefings today.

First, I wish to convey the condolences of the European Union to the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people in connection with the tragic attack on a military hospital that took place a few days ago in Kabul.

I should like to start by reiterating our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people and in coordinating the international community's assistance.

The Warsaw conference held in July and the Brussels conference on Afghanistan of October 2016 made clear the strong international commitment to Afghanistan. At the Brussels conference, the international community sent a clear signal in support of a process towards peace, security and stability.

All international security, political, economic, development and regional efforts should now be aligned to further such a political process. Terrorism and violent extremism are fundamental threats to all State actors, just as terrorism and the use of violence undermine regional peace and stability.

The EU remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that includes all Afghan citizens and their legitimate interests and preserves Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as equal rights for all Afghans under the Constitution of Afghanistan.

After the signing of the Hizb-i Islami peace agreement, for which the parties deserve credit, it will now be important to implement it and open the way for future peace agreements. In this regard, we welcome the Security Council's decision to de-list Hizb-i Islami's leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as an important step towards the full implementation of the peace agreement. The EU is ready to support further the implementation of this agreement.

We welcome the undeterred willingness of the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan groups opposing the Kabul Government to reach a lasting political settlement. We welcome all initiatives to create an environment conducive to such a process and call on all parties to engage so as to devise constructive solutions.

We welcome the further work that has been done by the Afghan Government since the Brussels conference to advance the implementation of its commitments and the progress made in anti-corruption, election preparation, revenue collection and budget execution as an example that must now followed by further, tangible results in the implementation of the reform agenda. The EU will remain attentive to the next steps.

I would like to highlight the importance of and the need for continued focus on ways and means of empowering Afghan women to build a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, as well as reinforcing the political and human rights of Afghan women and the realization of the full enjoyment of those rights in everyday life.

The EU welcomes the priority that the Afghan Government places on fighting corruption, which remains a major obstacle to development and stability, and stresses the need to further strengthen efforts to tackle corruption. The EU further welcomes the important results already achieved and looks forward to further follow-up.

We also support the reform of the security sector, with a focus on making advances in civilian policing in Afghanistan, building on the achievements of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan. The establishment of the new EU Special Representative police advisory team will contribute to the implementation of the new Afghanistan security-sector reform plan.

At the Brussels Conference, the international community welcomed the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and its ambitious development vision.

The EU and its member States welcome the adoption of the new election law and the appointment of the new commissioners to the electoral management bodies. These must now work in a professional and transparent manner to rebuild public confidence in the electoral processes. While technical aspects of the elections play an important role, the political will of Afghan stakeholders and a strong and cohesive leadership are necessary to deliver credible elections. The EU supports an early engagement with the electoral-management bodies and UNAMA's coordinating role. Any assistance must be forward-looking, leading to the implementation of meaningful electoral reforms as well as to the sustainable development of electoral institutions and improved electoral processes.

On 18 February, the signing between the EU and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of their first contractual relationship, the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, sent a strong political signal of the EU's enduring support for the country through the transformation decade and beyond. The Agreement will also provide the basis for developing a mutually beneficial relationship in an increasing range of areas such as the rule of law, health, rural development, education, science and technology, as well as actions to combat corruption, money laundering, the

financing of terrorism, organized crime and narcotics. It also foresees cooperation on migration.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, I would like to reiterate that joint State-building and development efforts in Afghanistan need to build on reinforced regional cooperation. Regional cooperation remains key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Threats of terrorism affecting all countries of the region can be confronted only with increased security cooperation. In the same vein, it is indispensable for sustainable development. In this regard, the EU strongly supports regional forums such as the Heart of Asia or the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan to continue to be used to facilitate cooperation among all regional actors.

To conclude, the EU and Afghanistan continue with the implementation of the EU-Afghanistan joint way forward agreement on migration issues and the bilateral member States' memorandums of understanding. In this process, the European Union puts strong emphasis on ensuring sustainable reintegration and providing substantial support to the Afghan Government to facilitate return and reintegration.

The EU has also continued its efforts to promote a regional approach and intends to focus on sustainable reintegration, local development, social cohesion in host communities and durable solutions to protracted displacement. UNAMA has played an important role in coordinating the international efforts to that end. We would encourage UNAMA to continue that work and the dialogue with the Afghan Government on the inclusion of internally displaced persons and returnees. The EU aims to develop a comprehensive EU response to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus and promote durable solutions to the challenges posed by the protracted nature of that crisis.

UNAMA's report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan documents a record number of civilian casualties in 2016, the majority of which were due to insurgent attacks. We call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the civilian population, especially Afghan women and children. We also need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

It is important that the international community remains strongly committed to supporting Afghanistan towards long-term progress and stability. The EU continues to consider UNAMA to be a key partner in achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. For that reason, we support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his most recent report.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wilson (Australia): Like others before me, I would like to express Australia's condemnation and condolences following the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack that took place in Kabul on 8 March. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and the Government of Afghanistan.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2017/189). Despite declines in a number of indicators in the report, Australia believes that 2017 could be a year of substantive progress in Afghanistan if the successes of Warsaw and Brussels are able to be capitalized on. The performance indicators have been agreed and Afghanistan has the sophisticated plans and funding in place to achieve them.

Challenges remain, including ongoing concerns about corruption, and access to Government services fuelled by insecurity and political instability. To that end, we welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to countering corruption and to reaching out to opinion leaders within and beyond the Government. We encourage the Afghan Government to recall its social contract with the Afghan people and continue progress towards the holding of elections in the coming year.

A stable Afghanistan remains central to stability in the region. Violent extremism has never respected national boundaries and we encourage all countries in the region to continue building on the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process by engaging in dialogue and cooperation to advance peace and stability. Australia remains committed to helping the Afghan security services rise to the challenge presented by the insurgency, and at Warsaw we extended our deployment of approximately 270 personnel to the NATO Resolute Support Mission. We remain in the top five donors contributing to the sustainment of Afghan forces.

We were deeply distressed to see civilian casualties rose by 3 per cent last year, to the highest level recorded

since 2009. Australia calls on all parties of the conflict to enact measures that protect the vulnerable, especially women and children. Long-term stability will require a successful Afghan-owned and -led peace process. We are encouraged by progress made towards implementing the agreement with Hezb-i-Islami in 2016. We urge the Afghan Government to continue engaging with empowered negotiators, including women, to bring an end to the insurgency.

Insecurity is fuelling a humanitarian crisis, with a record level of conflict-induced displacements and unprecedented numbers of people returning from Pakistan and Iran in 2016. Australia's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan — of almost $19 million last year — helped provide support that included critical shelter, food and health care to over 6.9 million Afghan people.

Australia remains committed to working with Afghanistan to address its development challenges. We have provided community-based education classes to more than 19,000 children since 2001. More than 70 per cent of the children were girls. Such classes are just a small part of our development programme in Afghanistan, and at the Brussels Conference Australia pledged to maintain current levels of aid funding through to 2020.

In conclusion, Australia sees a real opportunity for progress in Afghanistan this year. We call on the Afghan Government to build on the successes of 2016. We urge continued international cooperation to improve country and regional stability. We congratulate the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its important contribution. On his retirement, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of the United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Mark Bowden, who has made a great contribution to Afghanistan.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Buffin (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium thanks the Secretary-General for his quarterly report (S/2017/189) on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his clear and enlightening briefing.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

First and foremost, on behalf of my country, I would like to strongly condemn the reprehensible attack on the military hospital in Kabul. Targeting a hospital is a particularly vile, cowardly and barbaric act. Our condolences and sympathy go to the families of the victims and to the people of Afghanistan. Belgium, along with the international community, will continue to support Afghanistan in the fight against such acts of terror.

Regrettably, the report of the Secretary-General also reminds us that civilians continue to pay a very high price in the conflict. The increase in the number of children killed or injured is particularly unbearable. We support the Secretary-General's call for an end to attacks on civilians and to ensure that impunity does not triumph and that schools, hospitals, teachers and health workers are no longer targeted.

Paradoxically, despite those serious security problems, peace in Afghanistan is not a pipe dream. First, the current military impasse demonstrates that a military solution to the conflict simply does not exist. Secondly, the Afghan population, as a whole, exhausted by so many years of war, longs for stability and development. Finally, the restoration of peace will benefit both Afghans and their neighbours. I would like to mention four points that seem key to giving peace every chance to be restored.

First, it is important for the National Unity Government to continue to make every effort to gain the trust of the Afghan people through the implementation of policies aimed at ensuring the security of the population, eradicating corruption and impunity, promoting human rights — in particular those of women — and addressing shortcomings in the area of justice and good governance.

Secondly, it is important that the process of reconciliation and reconciliation encompass all components of Afghan society, including those that are currently opposed to the National Unity Government. Failing that, peace will remain elusive. In other words, we must ensure that the process is taken in hand and run by Afghans themselves. Women also have a crucial role to play in achieving lasting peace. They must be fully involved in the peace and reconciliation process.

Thirdly, the role of regional partners in the success of the peace and reconciliation process must be emphasized. In that regard, Belgium calls on all regional actors to use their influence to promote the resumption of peace talks and an end to the fighting, while leaving Afghans to take charge of their own destiny and complete the process of peace and reconciliation on their own.

Finally, economic development is another priority, as it will make the country less dependent on international aid, on the one hand, and illegal trade, on the other. The ongoing conflict profoundly affects the opportunities for growth; resources allotted to war are not used for development purposes.

However, deep economic reforms are also needed to create an environment conducive to the return of investment and the reappropriation of their future by the Afghans. The commitments made by the Afghan authorities at the Brussels conference with respect to their reform programme show that they are determined to do so. We encourage them to move forward in order to create the conditions to give the younger generations of Afghans, who are increasingly educated and harbour legitimate aspirations, the prospect of a better future in their own country.

Allow me to conclude by welcoming the action of United Nations personnel in Afghanistan. They do outstanding work under particularly difficult conditions. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) illustrates the international community's resolve to partner with the Afghans. With the renewal of the UNAMA mandate in the near future, the United Nations will once again reiterate its commitment to Afghanistan and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my statement by firmly condemning and offering the heartfelt condolences of Spain for the terrible attack that took place two days ago against the Sardar Daud Khan hospital in Kabul. We reiterate our full solidarity with Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism.

I also recall the universal obligation to respect the principles and norms of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in situations of conflict, in particular the mandate of resolution 2286 (2016) on the obligation to safeguard, always and without exception in situations of armed conflict, the integrity of health personnel and humanitarian personnel dedicated exclusively to medical missions, as well as their means of transport and equipment, hospitals and other health facilities.

I thank the Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar for their briefings, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

I fully endorse the statement delivered by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

We particularly welcome the presence here today of Ms. Samar, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. We admire her personal journey as a committed and active advocate for the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and we highly value her very important role and the work of the institution she chairs so ably. The promotion and protection of human rights are inseparable from the maintenance of peace and the achievement of social progress in every society. Afghanistan is no exception.

Support for Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has been one of Spain's priorities during our recently conclude two years as a non-permanent member of the Council. We are convinced that the Council must maintain its traditional spirit of commitment and consensus on this issue. Such consensual support for UNAMA and the authorities and people of Afghanistan is essential to help the Afghans, who are the true owners of their future, to overcome the conflict and advance along the path of progress and reconciliation. Spain encourages them to continue along this line.

It is only necessary and fair to acknowledge the remarkable progress made by Afghanistan, such as in its anti-corruption actions and policies for the promotion and protection of women's rights, whose implementation and dissemination still require strong and sustained efforts. We must nonetheless recognize, as does the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189), that security situation remains grave and has even suffered setbacks last year and early in this. Spain and the international community as a whole support the Government and the Afghan people in their efforts in the face of these grave challenges.

The unity of all political actors around these efforts is essential to the success of those efforts.In that regard, the electoral process whose foundations are currently being laid will be decisive. We therefore call on all political and social actors to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and progress and to rise to the vision that all Afghans expect and deserve.

But together with the consolidation of a democratic system of governance, Afghanistan needs peace and reconciliation in an increasingly more urgent way. All members of the international community have important contributions to make in that regard, but the input of the countries of the region is irreplaceable and essential. That is why we appeal to all countries neighbours and friends of Afghanistan to redouble their commitment to the stability of the country and to work for reconciliation with renewed energy and decision.

The statistics concerning the terrible effects of conflict civilians, as contained in the Secretary-General's report, must make us all lead to reflect, encourage us to maintain our solidarity, renew our determination to support Afghanistan's efforts and, above all and apart from other considerations, resolve us to spare no effort in favour of peace, reconciliation, stability and progress for Afghanistan and the Afghans.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. Canada would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his insightful briefing.

I would also like to welcome Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Canada is a long-standing believer in the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and supports its programmes.

I take this opportunity to extend our sincerest condolences to the people of Afghanistan, and especially to the families and friends of the victims of the horrible attack on a Kabul hospital. This is another unfortunate reminder of the difficult security situation in the country.

Canada fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and acknowledges the efforts made to date by the Government of Afghanistan. The continuity of the National Unity Government and its reform agenda are fundamental to peace, stability and progress in Afghanistan. Canada commends the progress that has been made on electoral reform and anti-corruption efforts, and supports continued reform. Canada is also pleased that parliamentary and district council elections are scheduled to be held in 2018.

(*spoke in English*)

Secondly, Canada is deeply concerned over the continuing deterioration of security in Afghanistan, with higher civilian and aid worker causalities reported in early 2017 than for the same time frame in 2016. We are dismayed by the toll on civilians. Their displacement, increased vulnerability and losses are unacceptable. In particular, we are concerned about the impact of instability and insecurity on women and children. We echo the statement issued by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan that all parties to the conflict need to take urgent steps to halt the killing and maiming of civilians. We look to Afghanistan's neighbours to continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to better coordinate and manage the return of Afghan refugees in order to support increased regional stability and decreased violence within the country.

Thirdly, Canada would like to commend the Afghanistan Government for launching in December its strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020. Last year, President Ghani inaugurated a dedicated fund to sponsor emergency services for women survivors of life-threatening acts of violence, and Canada encourages the Afghan Government to make this fund and the implementation of the law on ending violence against women a priority.

Canada's programming supports women's inclusion and empowerment through Afghanistan's development, as well as a wide variety of efforts to address violence against women. Examples include our assistance in implementing the law on the elimination of violence against women; delivering services for survivors of gender-based violence; and providing education, awareness-raising and capacity-building on women's rights and gender-based violence. Canada's programming is also supporting women to take on decision-making roles in their households and communities, and to build livelihood skills and capacities for economically marginalized women.

If peace, security and development are to take root in Afghanistan, women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels of Afghan politics, society and the economy. Canada stands with the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls, as they strive for a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

The President: I thank our briefers and all participants for their contributions to an interesting debate. I look forward to returning to the issue of Afghanistan with a vote on the renewal of the mandate of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan next week.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7897

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7897th meeting
Friday, 10 March 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and all the Security Council members, for inviting me to brief the Council on my visit in recent days to countries facing, or at risk of, famine — Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia. I will also briefly discuss the outcome of the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region. I have also been to the Somali region of Ethiopia and visited northern Kenya, where pastoralists are the worst affected by the terrible drought in that part of the African continent. More than 2.7 million Kenyans are now food-insecure, a number likely to reach 4 million by April. In collaboration with the Government of Kenya, the United Nations will soon launch an appeal for $200 million to provide urgent lifesaving assistance and protection. However, in the following remarks I will focus on my other visits over the past 16 days.

I turn first to Yemen. The humanitarian crisis there is already the largest in the world, and the Yemeni people now face the spectre of famine. Today, two thirds of the population — 18.8 million people — need assistance, while more than 7 million are hungry and do not know where their next meal will come from. That is 3 million more than in January. As the fighting in Yemen continues and escalates, displacement increases. With health facilities destroyed or damaged, diseases are sweeping through the country.

I spoke with people in Aden, Ibb, Sana'a and from Taiz. They told me horrific stories of displacement, of escaping unspeakable violence and destruction in Mokha and Taiz city in Taiz governorate. I saw first-hand the effects of losing home and livelihood — malnourishment, hunger and squalid living conditions in destroyed schools, unfinished apartments and wet concrete basements. In the past two months alone, more than 48,000 people have fled fighting, mines and improvised explosive devices in Mokha town and the surrounding fields alone. I met countless malnourished and sick children. My small team met a girl who had been displaced to Ibb who still had shrapnel wounds in her leg, while her brother was deeply traumatized. I was introduced to a 13-year-old girl who had fled Taiz city, left in charge of her seven siblings. I spoke with families living in a ruined school who had been displaced to Aden when their homes were destroyed by air strikes. All of them told me three things — they are hungry, they are sick and they need peace so that they can return home.

I travelled to Aden on the first United Nations humanitarian flight and met the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Yemen. I also met with the senior leadership of the Houthi and General People's Congress authorities in Sana'a. I discussed the humanitarian situation and the importance of preventing a famine, better respecting international humanitarian law and protecting civilians. I demanded full, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. All my counterparts promised to facilitate sustained access and to respect international humanitarian law. Yet all parties to the conflict are arbitrarily denying sustained humanitarian access and are politicizing aid. Already, the humanitarian suffering that we are seeing in Yemen today is caused by the parties and proxies, and if they do not change their behaviour immediately, they will have to be held accountable for the inevitable famine, unnecessary deaths and associated increase in suffering that will follow.

Despite the almost impossible and terrifying conditions, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are not deterred and are stepping up to meet the humanitarian needs across the country. In February alone, 4.9 million people received food assistance. We continue to negotiate access and make modest gains. For instance, despite assurances from all the parties of safe passage to Taiz city, I and my team were denied access and had to retreat a short distance to safety when we came under gunfire. But we managed to use that experience to enable us to clear the way to reach people inside Taiz city with the first humanitarian truck delivery, bringing eight tons of essential medicines on

the city road from Ibb to Taiz, since August 2016. We will leave no stone unturned in order to find alternative routes. We must prevail, because so many lives depend on us, the full range of the humanitarian family.

For 2017, the humanitarian community requires $2.1 billion in order to reach 12 million people in Yemen with lifesaving assistance and protection. Only 6 per cent of that funding has been received so far. An international ministeria-level pledging event is scheduled for 25 April, but the situation is so dire that I ask donors to give urgently now. All contributions and pledges made starting 1 January will be counted at that event.

I continue to reiterate the same message to all: it is only a political solution that will ultimately end human suffering and bring stability to the region. And at this stage, only a combined response with the private sector can avert a famine. Commercial imports must be allowed to resume through all entry points in Yemen, including, and especially, Hudaydah port, which must be kept open and expanded. With access and funding, humanitarian workers will do more, but they are not the long-term solution to the growing crisis.

As I just mentioned, a ministerial-level pledging event for the humanitarian response in Yemen for 2017 will take place in Geneva on 25 April. The Secretary-General will chair the event, co-hosted by the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Switzerland, to advocate for more resources and access. For 2017, the Yemen humanitarian response plan asks for $2.1 billion to assist 12 million people in need across all 22 governorates.

Turning to South Sudan, which I visited on 4 and 5 March, the situation is worse than it has ever been. The famine in South Sudan is man-made. Parties to the conflict are parties to the famine — as are those not intervening to make the violence stop.

More than 7.5 million people need assistance, up by 1.4 million from last year. About 3.4 million people are displaced, of which almost 200,000 have fled South Sudan since January alone. A localized famine was declared for Leer and Mayendit on 20 February, an area where violence and insecurity have compromised humanitarian access for years. More than 1 million children are estimated to be acutely malnourished across the country, including 270,000 children who face the imminent risk of death should they not be reached in time with assistance. Meanwhile, the cholera outbreak that began in June 2016 has spread to more locations.

I travelled to Ganyiel, in Unity state, where people have fled from the horrors of famine and conflict. I saw the impact humanitarians can have in alleviating suffering. I met an elderly woman with her malnourished grandson receiving treatment. I listened to women who fled fighting, wading through waist-high swamps with their children, to receive food and medicine. Some of those women have experienced the most appalling acts of sexual violence — which continues to be used as a weapon of war. Their harrowing stories are only a few among thousands who have suffered a similar fate across the country.

Humanitarians are delivering. Last year, partners reached more than 5.1 million people with assistance. However, active hostilities, access denials and bureaucratic impediments continue to curtail their efforts to reach people who desperately need help. Aid workers have been killed. Humanitarian compounds and supplies have been attacked, looted and occupied by armed actors. Recently, humanitarians had to leave one of the famine-affected counties because of fighting. Assurances by senior Government officials of unconditional access and no bureaucratic impediments now need to be turned into action on the ground.

In Somalia, more than half the population — 6.2 million people — need humanitarian and protection assistance, including 2.9 million who are at risk of famine and require immediate assistance to save or sustain their lives. Close to 1 million children under the age of 5 will be acutely malnourished this year. In the past two months alone, nearly 160,000 people have been displaced due to severe drought conditions, adding to the already 1.1 million people who live in appalling conditions around the country.

What I saw and heard during my visit to Somalia was distressing — women and children walk for weeks in search of food and water. They have lost their livestock, water sources have dried up and they have nothing left to survive on. With everything lost, women, boys, girls and men now move to urban centres.

We visited Baidoa with the Secretary-General, on his first field mission since he took office. We met with displaced people going through ordeals none of us could imagine. We visited the regional hospital where children and adults are desperately fighting to survive diarrhoea, cholera and malnutrition. Again, as if proof were needed, it was clear that between malnutrition and death there is always disease.

Large parts of southern and central Somalia remain under the control or influence of Al-Shabaab, and the security situation is volatile. Last year, some 165 violent incidents — an 18 per cent increase compared to 2015 — directly impacted humanitarian work and resulted in the deaths of 14 aid workers. Al-Shabaab, Government forces and other militia also continue to block major supply routes to towns in 29 of the 42 districts in southern and central Somalia. That has restricted access to markets, basic commodities and services, and is severely disrupting livelihoods. Blockades and double taxation bar farmers from transporting their grains. It is critical that Somali forces and those of the African Union Mission in Somalia secure vital road access to enable both lifesaving aid and longer term recovery. A lot of hope is placed in the new Government.

The current indicators mirror the tragic picture of 2011, when Somalia last suffered a famine. It should be noted that by the time the famine was recognized in 2011, half of the 260,000 people who died in the famine had already died. That is important for points I will make shortly. However, humanitarian partners now have a larger footprint, mature cash programming, better data through assessments, better controls on resources and vetting of partners, as well as stronger partnership with Government authorities. The Government recently declared the drought a national disaster and is taking steps to work with humanitarian partners to ensure a coordinated response. To be clear, we can avert a famine in Somalia. We have a committed new President who has been clear, a humanitarian and resilience track record and a detailed plan. We are ready despite the incredible risks and dangers. We have local and international leadership. We have a lot of access. And now we need the international community, gathered here, as well as donor agencies and nations, to invest in Somalia. It is lifesaving but we do need those huge funds now.

For all three of those situations, as well as for north-east Nigeria, an immediate injection of funds, plus safe and unimpeded access, are required to enable partners to avert a catastrophe; otherwise, many people will predictably die from hunger, livelihoods will be lost and political gains, which have been hard-won over the last few years, will be reversed. To be precise, we need $4.4 billion by July — and that is a detailed cost, not a negotiating number.

Before I visited all those countries, I was in Oslo, where the Governments of Norway, Germany and Nigeria, in partnership with the United Nations, organized a humanitarian conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Ten million seven hundred thousand million people need humanitarian assistance and protection, including 7.1 million people who are severely food insecure. Humanitarian partners scaled up their response to reach the most vulnerable groups threatened by violence, food insecurity and famine, particularly in north-east Nigeria — many Council members saw that for themselves on their recent mission to the region. Fourteen donors have pledged a total of $672 million, of which $458 million is for humanitarian action in 2017. That is very good news; I commend those who made such generous pledges, and I urge others to follow suit. More is needed, however, to secure the $1.5 billion required to provide the assistance needed across the Lake Chad region.

We stand at a critical point in our history. Already, at the beginning of the year, we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the establishment of the United Nations. More than 20 million people across four countries now face starvation and famine. Without collective and coordinated global efforts, people will simply starve to death. Many more will suffer and die from disease. Children will be stunted and out of school. Livelihoods, futures and hope will be lost. Communities' resilience will rapidly wilt away. Development gains will be reversed. Many will be displaced and will continue to move in search for survival, creating ever more instability across entire regions. The warning call and appeal for action by the Secretary-General can thus not be understated. It was right to take the risk and sound the alarm early, not wait for the pictures of emaciated, dying children on the world's television screens to mobilize a reaction and the funds.

The United Nations and humanitarian partners are responding. We have strategic, coordinated and prioritized plans in every country. We have the right leadership and heroic, dedicated teams on the ground. We are working hand-in-hand with development partners to marry the immediate life-saving with longer-term sustainable development. We are ready to scale up. This is, frankly, not the time to ask for more detail or use that postponing phrase, "What would you prioritize?" Every life on the edge of famine and death is equally worth saving.

Now we need the international community and the Council to act.

First and foremost, it must act quickly to tackle the precipitating factors of famine. Preserving and restoring normal access to food and ensuring all parties' compliance with international humanitarian law are key.

Secondly, with sufficient and timely financial support, humanitarians can still help to prevent the worst-case scenario. To do this, humanitarians require safe, full and unimpeded access to people in need. Parties to the conflict must respect this fundamental tenet of international humanitarian law, and those with influence over the parties must exert that influence now.

Thirdly, the fighting must stop. To continue on the path of war and military conquest is, I think we all know, to guarantee failure, humiliation and moral turpitude, and we will bear the responsibility for the millions who face hunger and deprivation on an incalculable scale because of it.

Allow me very briefly to sum up. The situation for people in each country is dire, and without a major international response, the situation will get worse. All four countries have one thing in common: conflict. This means that we — the Council — have the possibility to prevent and end further misery and suffering. The United Nations and its partners are ready to scale up, but we need the access and the funds to do more. It is all preventable. It is possible to avert this crisis, to avert these famines, to avert these looming human catastrophes.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien very much indeed for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Before doing so, I thank Council members in the main for their timekeeping this morning. Again this afternoon the light will start flashing if representatives do not finish their statements within the five minutes, and, if necessary, I will use the gavel to encourage them.

I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, who called this meeting.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like at the outset to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his very comprehensive and objective briefing on the results of his recent visit to a number of countries that find themselves in a very difficult humanitarian situation. In calling for this meeting, we were motivated first and foremost by the need to obtain first-hand evidence about what is taking place in the countries affected by the humanitarian disaster, including as concerns the situation in the Republic of Yemen.

A major part of the population of this country, which is historically friendly to Russia, requires humanitarian assistance. The country is on the verge of famine. Civilian infrastructure lies in ruins, and many businesses and facilities have been destroyed. First and foremost I wish to commend the selfless, brave work of United Nations humanitarian personnel in Yemen, including Humanitarian Coordinator McGoldrick. They continue to deal with the most practical tasks in helping the population of the country.

Our country, through its embassy in Sana'a, has contributed to establishing a secretariat to contribute to cooperation among the humanitarian structures of the United Nations and the local authorities of the Republic of Yemen in the capital. The secretariat will be tasked with solving problems related to the distribution of assistance among those in need . We call on all parties to refrain from any efforts to find a military solution to the situation. Such an approach will not bring about effective and long-term results. This would lead only to increasing misunderstanding and mistrust between the Yemeni parties and undermine prospects for a return to peace. We are convinced that resolving the conflict in Yemen can be done only through political means, through negotiations based on a balanced road map leading to a solution.

Although past efforts of the international community to bring Yemenis to agreement have not been successful, this does not mean that we should simply abandon this undertaking. We are continuing to work through our embassy in the country with all parties to the conflict, urging them to refrain from unilateral decisions that only block the launching of a negotiating process. As Mr. O'Brien rightly said, solutions to all problems in this connection should be sought only through political means.

Obviously, the winners of the Yemeni conflict are the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. With respect to Somalia, only Al-Shabaab is a winner there. Also winning are other the terrorist and extremist groups that control entire

regions in the south and east of Yemen. We know from the experience that we should not put off starting to fight terrorists. Postponing this will only complicate the situation.

We cannot but be concerned by the humanitarian situation in African countries visited by Mr. O'Brien. Many challenges remain in Somalia, where the terrorist group Al-Shabaab has been sowing terror. South Sudan faces equally urgent problems. We also need to unite our efforts at the regional and international levels. It is only through collective efforts that we will find appropriate solutions.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his very illuminating briefing and his exemplary commitment, and for his pressing appeal to all actors involved in the face of a situation in which millions of people are threatened with famine in Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria and are already experiencing famine, unfortunately, in South Sudan. I should like also to pay tribute to the admirable work done by humanitarian workers in the field, who are very often working in the most difficult of circumstances.

I should like to convey three main messages today.

The first is that the action of the United Nations, is essential as it is, cannot substitute for the responsibilities that the Governments of these four countries have vis-à-vis their populations. It is these Governments that have the primary responsibility to protect their populations.

In South Sudan, the recent declaration of famine in certain parts of the country is an illustration of the tragic situation that has prevailed in the country for more than three years now due to the political conflict. Because of the fighting and the violence of which they are the deliberate targets, entire populations have had to leave their land and their villages and can no longer provide for themselves. The fear of violence has also meant that some of that land, despite being fertile, has not been planted. Let us not be mistaken here: this famine is largely man-made.

We call upon the Government of South Sudan to take into account the needs of its population. In South Sudan and in Yemen, only a political solution to the conflicts there will make it possible to address the root causes of those conflicts and to put an end to the suffering of the people. In this regard, we support the mediation efforts led by the United Nations, in particular the work of the Special Envoy on Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in enabling the resumption and continuation of negotiations, and an early and lasting cessation of hostilities.

In South Sudan, we call for the rapid implementation of the peace agreement; the national dialogue should not be an obstacle in this respect. The rule of law and good governance are also essential to prevent such scourges. We hope that the commitments undertaken by the new Somali President, Mr. Farmajo, will be followed up by concrete action, particularly with regard to the reform of the security sector.

In South Sudan, constraints on public freedoms is of concern. The second message that I would like to send today is that the United Nations and humanitarian actors must be able to access all people who need their help, without bureaucratic red tape or threats to their security. Mounting tensions — even hostility — with regard to humanitarian actors hamper the delivery of supplies and the provision of basic needs. That is often compounded by the refusal of access by armed groups on the ground, as well as administrative blockages and lengthy bureaucratic procedures. As Mr. O'Brien has just mentioned, there is an ever-growing number of obstacles to humanitarian assistance.

The Governments of the States concerned have a special responsibility. They must ensure safe and unhindered access to the United Nations and humanitarian actors, wherever populations need emergency assistance. The various bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the authorities, in particular the South Sudanese authorities, are helping to slow down the provision of the necessary aid to the most vulnerable populations.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in South Sudan, where humanitarian actors and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan are all too often the target of attacks, harassment or access restrictions. These hindrances are committed by all the parties to the conflict, be it the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the SPLA in Opposition, or the various armed groups that are multiplying in the country. These access restrictions must cease immediately. We must collectively and unambiguously express our condemnation of such barriers, which are contrary to international humanitarian law. I recall that all parties to conflicts are obligated to facilitate

the delivery of food supplies. Without that, the mobilization of the international community would be absolutely ineffective.

These problems are also quite acute in Yemen, where the ongoing fighting threatens to further exacerbate the humanitarian situation. The parties to the conflict must immediately cease indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such actions could be classified as war crimes. It is also imperative that humanitarian actors have unhindered access in order to bring the basic necessities to the population.

The third message I want to deliver today is that in order to cope with the magnitude of the financial need, it is important to foster a comprehensive approach in order to create synergies and to improve coordination with other donors, and to mobilize goodwill, including — as Stephen O'Brien said — private donors and businesses, as well as "non-traditional" donors, in particular emerging economies. It is through general mobilization and the use of all means at our disposal that we can help people in need and respond to the call of Stephen O'Brien. In that context, we welcome the holding of the Yemen donors' conference, to be held 25 April in Geneva.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): This is not the first time that I do not know whether to thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefings, which generally strike at the very core of our being. Of course, we thank him for moving us so profoundly, for doing this in-depth work and for sharing it with us so frequently.

I would have wished to speak before the Ambassador of France, who basically, delivered my entire statement. There is very little left of what I wanted to say that has not already been said by him. Our intention was to speak of the common denominator linking humanitarian crises, which is that they take place within the context of conflicts. It is therefore essential to find a solution to those conflicts. To that end, it is necessary for all who can exert their influence to do so. At the same time, allowing access for humanitarian assistance to the civilian population is fundamental.

Although the French Ambassador completely shattered my statement, allow me to stress one issue that has long been of particular concern to my delegation — indiscriminate attacks against hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure. Scores of hospitals have been attacked, with great loss of life. In Yemen, for example, half of the existing hospitals are not operational. Given that the essence of what I wanted to say has already been covered, I will not take up any more time.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, whose briefing was clearly not just a set of business-as-usual remarks. Mr. O'Brien just described what could soon become the most serious food-security emergency in the modern era, unless States members of the United Nations act now to stop it.

The United Nations is warning us that more than 20 million people are starving in Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin. As Mr. O'Brien pointed out in his briefing, famine has already been declared in some areas of South Sudan. The same could soon follow in Yemen, Somalia and the Lake Chad basin if the international community does not intervene immediately.

Every member of the Security Council and of the United Nations should be outraged that we are confronting famine in the year 2017. Famine is a man-made crisis with man-made solutions. No country should be destined to face famine in a world that has more than enough food to feed every single person. It is not too late to prevent famine from spreading. It is not inevitable. However, preventing famine means that the parties fighting on the ground have to prioritize access to food, health care and other life-saving aid. They must also take measures to reduce the impact of hostilities on the civilian population. We therefore call on the members of the Council to use their influence over the parties in these four situations to allow unfettered access and not obstruct aid.

Additionally, it is vital that the United Nations and its partners have the resources they need in order to respond. Right now, only 1.6 per cent of the four appeals for Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria are funded. Collectively, we must contribute more to this relief effort. By numbers of people at risk, the stakes in Yemen are the highest, as Mr. O'Brien has impressed upon us. The United Nations has assessed that 65 per cent of all households in Yemen are food insecure. Some 7.3 million people need food and emergency aid, and 460,000 children under five years old are suffering from severe, acute malnutrition — which is up 200 per cent since 2014. Moreover, we hear that the United Nations Children's Fund now estimates that one child dies every 10 minutes in Yemen from

malnutrition-related causes. We know that Yemen is overwhelmingly dependent on imports for its food and that humanitarian aid is insufficient to meet the enormity of the need. Commercial food imports are critical to averting famine. And, just like the other three cases, in Yemen, an end to the conflict would do the most to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

That is why the United States supports the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, to renew the cessation of hostilities and bring the parties back to the table for negotiations. There is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. A comprehensive peace would require compromise from all sides for the sake of the Yemeni people. While the conflict continues, the parties must allow sustained access, both for humanitarian aid and for the commercial import of food, medicine, fuel and other basic supplies. These essential goods must be able to arrive through all of the ports of Yemen, and they must be able to move within Yemen. The United Nations verification and inspection mechanism plays a key role in facilitating food deliveries. However, constraints on access, particularly at Hudaydah — as Mr. O'Brien noted — contribute to the risk of famine. The closure of Sana'a airport, along with checkpoints on the ground, complicate relief efforts even more. The obstructions to aid in Yemen must be lifted.

The United States also urges international and regional partners to help Yemenis afford to buy food again. Contributing to the cash transfer programmes that provide payments to Yemen's neediest families would help prevent families from going hungry.

The United Nations has already declared a famine in certain areas of South Sudan. Responsibility for this famine lies squarely with the country's leaders, who are fighting a senseless conflict as their people starve. This conflict has caused almost 3.5 million people to flee their homes, forcing many to abandon their farms. People are hiding from the violence in swamps. They are surviving by eating waterlillies and grasses or taking enormous risks by trying to flee to neighbouring countries. But even as 100,000 people face starvation now and 5.5 million people face severe hunger this coming summer, South Sudan's leaders are making it even more difficult to deliver aid. Of couse, South Sudan's leaders have tried to say that they will solve these challenges, but look at what they are actually doing. There are reports that Government officials are expelling humanitarian staff from famine-stricken areas. This is an outrage.

The United States calls on the Government of South Sudan to uphold one of its most fundamental obligations to its citizens, that is, to keep them from starving to death and to allow humanitarian aid organizations to do their jobs in helping people. As Mr. O'Brien noted, with the Secretary-General's recent visit to Somalia, he brought much-needed attention to Somalia's worsening hunger crisis. The Somali people, however, continue to grapple with the impact of decades of conflict. We know that in 2011, nearly 260,000 Somalis died in a famine and now after several poor rainy seasons, Somalia yet again faces a looming famine with 50 per cent of the population in need of assistance. But the difference between then and now is that the international community is mobilized and in place to provide aid and that a new Federal Government of Somalia is ready to coordinate a drought response. But again, funding, as Mr. O'Brien noted, is the primary obstacle to saving lives. Of the $825 million required for famine prevention and response in Somalia, only 16.2 per cent of what is required has been received.

Finally, members of the Council just saw first hand the suffering in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, where more than 10 million civilians — two out of every three people in the region — are in need of humanitarian assistance. Some organizations already believe that famine occurred in parts of Nigeria last year and experts warn that up to 120,000 people could face famine by this summer.

It is a daunting challenge, as we saw, to get aid to this area, as the region's militaries continue to combat Boko Haram's brutality. In the midst of this fight, humanitarians and civilians are threatened by ambushes, suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices. But to save people from starving to death, humanitarians need safe ways to reach them — again echoing Under-Secretary-General O'Brien. We saw during our trip that there is scope for greater collaboration between military officials and humanitarian organizations, which could allow greater access. These groups are able to deliver aid to 2.1 million people now, which is a massive improvement from where we were last year, but 5.1 million people still need help. The United Nations and its partners are still not able reach more than 50 per cent of the people going hungry. That is why the United Nations and the Governments around the Lake Chad

basin have to do more to open up access in the areas hardest hit by the fight against Boko Haram.

In closing, the bottom line is that all of us know the steps required to prevent famine. The members of the Council and all other countries with influence need to press the parties on the ground to open up humanitarian access and minimize the impact of hostilities on the population. We also need to give the United Nations the resources it needs to help. Starvation is preventable, but only if we all have the will to act.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for calling a meeting on this very important issue. I would like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing today. We must take his dire message very seriously.

I join others in thanking all humanitarian workers in these countries for their courage and dedication under such difficult conditions.

I would like to begin with Yemen. On 22 February, the Secretary-General announced that Yemen was one of four countries that faced a devastating level of food insecurity. Food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen were concerns even before the onset of the current crisis in the summer of 2014, and Japan has continued to prioritize funding to the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

Mr. O'Brien has described the seriousness and complexity of the situation and the circumstances on the ground. Ongoing fighting decreases the volume of commercial imports to Yemen, which already struggles with food production, thereby increasing the price of food. The fighting deepens the economic crisis, delays the payment of salaries and makes it difficult for ordinary people to buy basic necessities. The fighting also prevents the United Nations and other humanitarian actors from delivering assistance.

Japan is deeply concerned by reports that Hudaydah will become the next battlefield after Mocha. Hudaydah is the backbone of Yemen's economy. If Hudaydah, and in particular its port, are severely damaged, economic and food insecurity will worsen. It is deeply regrettable that fighting, shelling and airstrikes are continuing. The Security Council is united in calling for a political solution, repeatedly underscoring that there is no military solution. The parties must listen to the voices of the Yemeni people and the international community and seek a ceasefire and sustainable peace.

Japan strongly supports the United Nations approach to the Yemen crisis, which begins with a credible cessation of hostilities monitored by the De-escalation and Coordination Committee and follows with face-to-face consultations by the parties with United Nations mediation. We see no serious alternatives. Japan believes there is no disagreement among P-5 members in this regard. We must also take very seriously the findings by the panel of experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) that terrorist groups are actively exploiting the changing political environment and governance vacuums to recruit new members and stage new attacks.

Almost one year has passed since Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed announced a nation-wide cessation of hostilities just before the launch of the Kuwait round of talks. We are frustrated by slow progress in the political process and the worsening fighting, but we must continue to support Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed's efforts. Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed and the United Nations should be increasingly vocal and visible in drawing the attention of the international community to this issue. The Council should consider delivering a strong, unified message to the parties supporting the United Nations mediation role and urging the parties to cease hostilities and allow unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access immediately.

In light of the very concerning situation in South Sudan, Japan announced an approximately $22.4-million contribution in January to United Nations agencies for humanitarian and reconstruction projects. We are considering further assistance in response to worsening conditidions. Japan remains deeply concerned by the continued access restrictions for humanitarian actors. We urge President Kiir to honour his statement to Parliament on 21 February and his commitment to ensure unimpeded access. We need concrete action by the South Sudanese leadership.

Finally, Japan is concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in Somalia. We must not repeat the tragedy of 2011. If this situation is not addressed, progress in the Somali State formation process could be jeopardized. Japan has therefore pledged more than $22 million in humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia, part of which will provide urgent nutritional assistance. We are also seriously considering further

actions in response to the calls by the Somali people, as well as by the United Nations.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Like others, I would like to thank the Russian Federation for requesting this important meeitng.

Let me start by thanking Emergency Relief Coordinator O'Brien for undertaking this important mission and for shining a spotlight on these worsening humanitarian crises. The present situation in countries like Yemen and South Sudan, where famine has now been declared, is utterly appalling and completely unacceptable. The Council has seen the crisis in the Lake Chad basin first hand. Immediate action is needed.

We therefore fully support the call of the Secretary-General for increased financial resources and improved humanitarian access. Emergency funding must be scaled up so that the United Nations system and its partners can deliver lifesaving assistance to those in need. Sweden has significantly increased its humanitarian assistance to those countries. We call on others to do the same. The humanitarian response must also be allowed to reach those in need; that means humanitarian access in all contexts. We call on all parties to respect humanitarian principles and to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Only political solutions can end the humanitarian suffering and bring sustainable peace and development. As we heard from the Deputy Secretary-General (see S/PV.7894), lasting recovery requires investment in comprehensive approaches that address conflict, chronic underdevelopment and the effects of climate change. We need to close the gap between humanitarian assistance and development interventions, and we need new ways of working to do so. We can all do better and we must do better.

Let us now turn to country-specific situations. I think that all situations discussed today are worth mentioning but, in the interest of time, I will focus on Yemen and South Sudan.

The situation in Yemen is both shocking and utterly intolerable. We cannot look the other way when we are told that 19 million people lack humanitarian protection; when we hear that 7 million people do not know where to find their next meal; that one child dies every 10 minutes, and perversely, that many of those who do escape the military conflict or starvation then risk dying for lack of simple medical interventions. There is an urgent need to supply additional shrinking reserves of medicine, food and fuel. All parties have an obligation to allow unimpeded humanitarian access. Parties must refrain from bureaucratic constraints to the delivery of aid, across front lines, facilitate commercial imports through all ports — especially the life-line that is Hudaydah — and resume commercial flights.

As we have heard, immediate action is needed to prevent widespread famine. However, the United Nations lacks the funding needed to scale up its response. The humanitarian response plan referred to by the Under-Secretary-General is currently only 6 per cent funded. In response, as we have heard today, Switzerland and Sweden, together with the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have taken the initiative to convene a high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen on 25 April in Geneva. We invite all partners to attend and urge them to pledge generously and to quickly disburse increased support for the crisis. Humanitarian aid will never resolve the crisis in Yemen. There is an urgent need to renew the cessation of hostilities and to intensify efforts towards reaching a negotiated political agreement to provide a durable solution to the unfolding crisis.

In South Sudan, the deteriorating security situation is contributing directly to the humanitarian crisis. Only an end to the conflict can lead to a real improvement in the lives of the South Sudanese people. An immediate cessation of hostilities and a revitalized and truly inclusive political process, supported by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and the United Nations, is urgently needed. Let me also stress that it is totally unacceptable that aid workers in South Sudan are being attacked and killed. Humanitarians continue to face multiple obstacles, including the denial of access and bureaucratic impediments. We urge all parties, including the Government, to meet their obligations to provide full and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout South Sudan.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the international community needs to take immediate action if widespread famine and death are to be avoided. The human catastrophe of failing of failing to do is unimaginable.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We appreciate today's update by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and

his committed efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation globally and in the Middle East and Africa, in particular. My delegation would like to make the following observations.

With regard to Yemen, an escalation of the military offensive has resulted in a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen, leading to food shortages, rising food and fuel prices, disruption to agricultural production and other catastrophic consequences. Nearly 19 million people or more than two-thirds of the population need humanitarian assistance and protection. It is obvious that action must be launched so that lifesaving humanitarian programmes can alleviate the gravity of the crisis. To that end, the commercial air service to Sana'a should be resumed, together with strong control over imported goods, in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015) to facilitate the rapid delivery of medicine, food and other necessities.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation can be mitigated only by ending the violence through a cessation of hostilities and an inclusive political process as solutions for durable peace. We urge all parties to ensure the unhindered movement of commercial and humanitarian supplies, without which millions of human beings are at risk of famine and death. All parties in conflict must come to the negotiating table to facilitate timely, full and unimpeded humanitarian access.

With regard to Somalia, we express great concern about the humanitarian situation and urge the international community to respond with urgent action to help families and individuals recover from the drought. We must, at all costs, avoid a humanitarian tragedy right now so that Somalia does not experience a situation similar to that of 2011. When the famine was declared at that time, half of those who needed help had already died. At this stage, it is crucial to strengthen the security sector through well-planned reform, whereby the international community could assist the new Government in fighting terrorist organizations.

On South Sudan, we express deep concern that famine was declared in February in parts of that country. Hunger and malnutrition, which have reached critical levels, could be aggravated further by the summer months if not addressed urgently with timely action. In that regard, we commend Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for being vocal with officials in Juba about the dire humanitarian situation in the country. It is clear that the present crisis is also a direct consequence of the conflict and the obstruction of humanitarian access. Kazakhstan underscores the need for a cessation of hostilities in South Sudan in order to end the suffering of the South Sudanese people. We call on the Government of South Sudan to provide access for humanitarian agencies to those parts of the country that were seriously affected by famine, given the fact that hundreds of thousands of people in South Sudan will starve unless relief workers gain access to populations in need.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for its initiative to convene today's debate. I would also like to thank Mr. O'Brien and his team for their work on one of the most sensitive issues for the international community, and it is in that spirit that we meet today. We intend to make every effort to ease the tragic situation in various parts of the world.

We, too, are concerned about the alarming developments in South Sudan and Somalia. We believe that the solution to such situations must be political in nature. We reiterate our support for the efforts of Mr. O'Brien and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs because we believe that their work is fundamental.

With regard to Yemen, we stated earlier that silence is eloquent because much can be conveyed through silence. I believe that with respect to the situation in Yemen, the Council's silence could well be interpreted in another way. We believe that it is imperative for us to look more closely at the situation in Yemen from every angle. We reiterate that the Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly believes that a solution to the conflict in Yemen will be reached only through a political process and not through the use of violence.

The statistics that Mr. O'Brien cited for us are quite shocking. We are talking about 21.2 million people who are in need of assistance and protection to meet their basic needs. Some 17 million people are suffering from food insecurity, which is a very elegant way of saying that they are on the verge of famine, and 3.3 million pregnant women are in a state of malnutrition. The representatives of the United States and Sweden recalled another figure, which is that a child dies in Yemen every 10 minutes owing to the lack of food. If we consider how many children have died since the

beginning of this meeting, we realize just how serious the situation is.

I will not repeat all of the statistics that Mr. O'Brien's briefing covered in such detail, but the situation in Yemen has resulted in more than 10,000 deaths with the war that began in March 2015. On behalf of the delegation of Bolivia, I reiterate that the Security Council has remained silent for too long on this issue, which, at the same time, is also suspicious. We are very concerned about the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Yemen and the famine threatening the lives of millions of people. We are also concerned by the limited humanitarian assistance that can be deployed continues to be attacked along with civilian installations.

Like other colleagues, we are very concerned in particular about the province of Hudaydah, which has been subject to restrictions despite the fact that thousands of Yemenis are in need of the humanitarian assistance that arrives through its port and about the constant attacks affecting its operational capacity. The United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative for the Republic of Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, told the *Washington Post* on 24 February that the attacks have destroyed bridges and roads throughout the entire port province of Hudaydah, while unexploded rockets landed inside the port, thereby further reducing the number of imports and vessels willing to travel to Yemen. A unilateral blockade has been imposed that restricts food and medicine imports on which millions of Yemenis depend and that now have to be transferred from ports in the south to reach the millions of people who risk dying of hunger in the north. Of its food and medicine, Yemen depends on approximately 20 per cent imports, and to prevent them is really an attack on the Yemeni population and runs contrary and is an affront to international humanitarian law.

In that regard, we believe that there is something concrete that we can do today in the Security Council, and that is to send out an absolutely clear, unequivocal and unanimous message that the restrictions on Hudaydah port have to be lifted to provide access for humanitarian assistance. Of course, it will take time and other actions depending on the economic needs to attend to the situation, but we believe that at the very least the Council has the obligation to unanimously reiterate its call to lift restrictions on that port.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing and the tireless efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in providing humanitarian assistance to all areas of Yemen. We and all countries of the world highly value their work. My statement will focus on the situations in Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia.

With regard to the situation in Yemen, my delegation is concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation affecting our brotherly Yemeni people. We stress the need to allow the unconditional access of humanitarian assistance to all areas of Yemen. We regret that Houthis continue to stall in providing access for and entry of assistance in Taiz city. We also denounce the fact that they did not allow the Under-Secretary-General to enter Taiz city during his visit to Yemen. We call upon the international community to increase its contributions at the humanitarian level in Yemen to ensure sufficient funding for relief agencies.

Moreover, it is important to continue to promote the efficient delivery of assistance in Yemen once it reaches the country, including through improving the delivery networks of relief agencies. We also call for studying the possibility of deploying United Nations observers of the stocks controlled by Houthis, especially at Hudaydah port, so as to end certain practices that have been recently reported by the coalition, including stalling the entrance of authorized ships into the port, which only increases the suffering of our brotherly Yemeni people.

The humanitarian suffering affecting the people of South Sudan has increased over the past month and reached unprecedented levels. The vicious cycle of fighting that has been waged since 2013 has resulted in the displacement of millions of civilians. Hundreds of thousands have become the victims of hunger and malnutrition. There is therefore an urgent need to facilitate access to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in the affected areas in a rapid, safe and unhindered manner to allow it to implement the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. Today more than ever, the people of South Sudan are in need of the support of the international community and donors. The necessary resources required to fight this humanitarian crisis have risen to an estimated at $1.6 billion, the greater part of which has yet to be raised.

We express our deep concern with regard to the increasingly serious consequences of the crisis resulting from the drought and malnutrition affecting the people of the Somalia. We must urgently address this crisis, which threatens to impede all political and security gains achieved thus far in Somalia, while taking into account the competition to draw on already scarce natural resources and the conflicts that it could cause in the affected regions. We also stress the need to increase regional and international efforts to provide relief for areas affected by drought and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Somali citizens whose number is estimated at 6 million.

It is also important to support the ongoing coordination among different parties in the relief process and ensure the participation the Somali Federal Government and all concerned regional administrations in every phase. If we hope to end the suffering of the Somali people, we must build on the lessons learned from our experience in dealing with the drug crisis that has affected Somalia since 2011. We must also promote the capacity-building of Somali institutions so that they can mitigate the economic and humanitarian consequences of future crises.

To conclude, I would like to stress that the common denominator of the three countries is their ongoing political crises. Despite their different contexts, the continuing severe deterioration of the respective humanitarian situations is a direct result of the absence of a political settlement in the three countries. We can sustainably improve the humanitarian situations and end the suffering of civilians in Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia only through an inclusive political process that paves the way for a political solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. Despite its importance, humanitarian assistance will never be able to provide a final long-term solution for the crises affecting the people of those countries.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I wish to thank the Russian Federation for requesting this meeting and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing and the hard work that they and all the humanitarian actors put into their daily activities.

During his recent visit to Yemen, Secretary-General Guterres highlighted the interconnection between today's crises and the importance of promoting an integrated approach to peace and security. We fully support this vision, particularly in the light of the recent Security Council trip to the Lake Chad basin, and we subscribe to the Secretary-General's call for immediate famine-prevention assistance.

Italy, like others, is of course seriously concerned about the situation in Yemen and the violent destruction of lives that Under-Secretary-General O'Brien has so eloquently described today and in his briefing of 26 January (see S/PV.7870), which was an eye-opener in many ways. Italy is already providing help to the Yemeni people in the areas of nutrition and aid to women and girls who are the victims of violence. This year, we plan to make a further contribution, to be announced at the next donor conference in Geneva, but we have also taken note of the urgency of today's appeal.

But creating a fund, of course, is not enough. The assistance must reach those in need. We therefore call on all the parties to the conflict to guarantee full, speedy and unimpeded humanitarian access at all times. Needless to say, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. A political agreement is the only way out, so all parties to the conflict must ultimately show their commitment to negotiating a solution under the auspices of the United Nations and the Special Envoy. The Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs is currently visiting the region to discuss the political dimensions of the crisis and how Italy can lend political and humanitarian assistance.

The crisis in Yemen is closely linked to that in neighbouring Somalia, and we commend the Under-Secretary-General for the regional perspective underlining the connections between the two. Somali refugees in Yemen and returnees from Yemen are also a matter for concern, since they may be contributing to the illicit trafficking connections between transnational organized crime and terrorist groups, whose presence in the area is growing. Italy will continue to support Somalia's newly elected President Farmajo and the Somalian authorities in their efforts to deal with a difficult situation, with a particular focus on issues such as the empowerment of women and young people, nutrition, social protection and resilience, access to health services, and demining.

But that must be a collective effort, and in that regard I would like to commend the generosity that has been shown by Somalia's neighbours, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, in hosting Somali refugees from drought, climate change and security threats, as was also pointed out by the Secretary-General during his

recent visit. We also welcome the round table convened by President Farmajo in Mogadishu recently and look forward to further results from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development conference held on 25 March on Somali refugees, and to the conference to be held on Somalia in London in May.

With regard to South Sudan, I would like to comment briefly on two specific aspects of the crisis that are of particular concern for us. The first is the limitations imposed on humanitarian access for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and for non-governmental organizations. The second is the potential role of South Sudanese churches in alleviating the crisis and strengthening the population's resilience. Churches are often the last bastion for humanitarian assistance at the grassroots level, and yet, as demonstrated in the case of Kajo Keji two weeks ago, they are increasingly subject to intimidation, harassment and violence. We firmly condemn attacks on religious freedom and the safety of the country's religious places, and reiterate our firm support to the Council of South Sudan Churches in its brave efforts to uphold peace, dialogue and reconciliation in the region.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his faithful and striking account of the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the three countries he just visited. For the sake of brevity and the President's call for concision, I will focus on the situation in Yemen, while also touching on some political and security issues, which, as has been rightly noted by Mr. O'Brien and reinforced by Egypt and other delegations, directly affect the humanitarian issues in all three of these countries.

Like other speakers, we are concerned by the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen and urge all the parties to ensure the sustainable delivery of humanitarian supplies, without which millions of Yemenis are at risk of famine and death. We welcome the first humanitarian truck's delivery of vital medical equipment to Taiz city. However, we deplore the fact that Mr. O'Brien was prevented from visiting Taiz, and echo his call to all the parties to the conflict to accept their responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law, including guaranteeing sustainable, full and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Ukraine remains convinced of the urgent need to put an end to the violence in Yemen and reach a sustainable political solution to the conflict. In that context, we are increasingly concerned about the surge in rocket attacks launched by Houthi forces in Yemen on targets located within Saudi Arabian territory and on maritime vessels operating near Bab Al-Mandeb. Keeping that important shipping passage safe and secure is of paramount importance. The Al-Houthi-Saleh forces have also increased their use of ballistic missiles. We call for such attacks to cease immediately and urge that the necessary steps to be taken to de-escalate the situation. In that regard, it is vital that any further weapon shipments to the Houthi-Saleh forces be blocked if we are to prevent escalation of the conflict. Delivering ever more sophisticated weaponry to the Houthi fighters is not going to help the situation.

Achieving a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Yemen continues to be complicated. We reiterate our support to Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in his pursuit of such a solution, and we welcome his recent efforts to revive the talks, as well as Jordan's contribution to them. Without meaningful dialogue, the results may be disastrous, and the only party to benefit from that would be the terrorist groups that are increasingly active in Yemen. It is disconcerting to see Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula continue to demonstrate its ability to expand its operational support base in Yemen and exploit the deep lines of division in war-torn Yemeni society. We must work collectively to prevent that from happening.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank the representative of the Russian Federation for requesting the convening of today's meeting, and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing on his recent visit to Yemen and other countries. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its work to ease the humanitarian situation in those countries, and call on the international community to extend a helping hand in order to alleviate that crisis.

We have frequently discussed the situations in South Sudan and Somalia, so in order to save time I will focus on the situation in Yemen.

China is troubled by the escalating conflict there and concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation, the recurring attacks on civilians and civilian facilities, the famine facing the Yemeni people and other risk factors. The humanitarian situation is crying out for improvement, and the Yemeni people need external support. China urges the parties to the conflict in Yemen

to abide strictly by international humanitarian law, stop the attacks on civilians and civilian targets, actively support the United Nations in its humanitarian relief efforts and ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. The international community should also join the efforts to improve the humanitarian situation. China has been providing humanitarian relief to the Yemeni people, including a shipment of medical supplies worth ¥2,000-million that is expected to be in place very soon, in the first half of the year, and we will continue to provide such assistance as we can.

Peace and stability in Yemen are essential to efforts aimed at fundamentally relieving the humanitarian situation in that country, and political dialogue is the only way to achieve lasting peace there. China urges all the parties to demonstrate a sincere desire for reconciliation, cease hostilities immediately and prevent the situation from escalating. We support Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed in the scaling up of his good offices and in supporting regional countries in their work to facilitate peace talks and build confidence in order to help Yemen restore stability at an early date.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for the comprehensive briefing on his recent visit to Yemen and other countries in our region, including Somalia and South Sudan, which are facing enormous humanitarian challenges. Nor can I forget to mention his visit to the Somali region of Ethiopia, which is facing a drought situation.

What we heard from Mr. O'Brien is indeed disturbing, given the scale and magnitude of the humanitarian challenge. We take this opportunity to express appreciation to the Secretary-General, who undertook his first field visit to Somalia to show solidarity and make a strong appeal to the international community for support.

Like others, we will restrict ourselves to the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which is indeed a source of grave concern. The people of Yemen are at risk of falling into famine if action is not taken now. Therefore, the international community must respond urgently and decisively to avert a humanitarian tragedy. In this regard, we support the call made by Mr. O'Brien for an immediate international response. Ensuring safe and unhindered humanitarian access is indeed imperative to deliver much-needed assistance to the millions of Yemenis affected. We express appreciation to all humanitarian workers on the ground, who are operating under extremely difficult circumstances to reach people in need.

We agree with Mr. O'Brien that addressing the huge funding gap is absolutely critical to meet the urgent humanitarian needs in Yemen. We note with concern that only 6.3 per cent of the required $2.1 billion has been received so far. We hope that the high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, to be hosted by the United Nations and the Governments of Switzerland and Sweden on 25 April in Geneva, will contribute to mobilizing the necessary support to address the existing funding gap.

Finally, we agree with all the other members that the security, economic and humanitarian challenges in Yemen cannot be addressed without finding a resolution to the Yemeni crisis. That is why achieving a comprehensive political settlement should be an urgent priority. In this regard, we will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, to resume inclusive peace talks and achieve a cessation of hostilities according to the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank the Russian Federation for having requested this briefing and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for the very important information that he has provided us on the humanitarian situation on the ground.

My delegation fully endorses the very relevant statements made by previous speakers, which is why I would simply like to touch upon several points, so as not to repeat what others have said.

We are particularly concerned by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the four countries: Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria. Indeed, the figures and the very sombre predictions are chilling and canot but prod our collective conscience.

Concerning Yemen, my delegation would like to remind the parties to the conflict, in particular the Houthis and their allies, of their obligations pursuant to international law, among which is the need to ensure immediate, lasting, secure and unhindered access to all those who require assistance throughout Yemen. My delegation wishes also to urge the parties, in particular the Houthis and their allies, to resume in good faith negotiations based on a realistic approach and trust so as to achieve a political solution, which is the only way to

put an end to this crisis and its disastrous humanitarian and security consequences.

The famine that is afflicting several areas of South Sudan is obviously a great source of concern to us. More than ever before, the country requires the assistance and support of the international community to enable it not only to overcome this humanitarian crisis but also to strengthen its own capacity to urgently address extreme situations such the current famine.

Concerning the situation in the countries of the Lake Chad basin and in Somalia, we believe, as Stephen said, that the situation and in particular the famine that is approaching is not inevitable. We acknowledge the efforts that have been made by partners and the United Nations to help these countries, but we believe that the international community must do better and do more on an urgent basis given the current context, characterized by the proliferation in some of those countries of terrorist groups, which are the primary beneficiaries of any deterioration in the humanitarian situation.

On this point, we wish to express the hope that the visit that the Council has just made to the Lake Chad basin countries, which made it possible to take stock of the scale of the challenges, is just the first step towards not only mobilizing the international community in order to make it possible for all four countries to overcome the humanitarian ordeal they are facing, but also allowing them to demonstrate greater resilience in the face of the many challenges that confront them.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I should like to begin by thanking Stephen for his briefing as well as for his initiative and stamina in confronting the toughest humanitarian challenges that the world presents, and through him may I pay tribute to all humanitarian workers responding to these humanitarian challenges, which are of a scale so unprecedented, so unacceptable that it is almost unimaginable. More than 20 million men, women and children risk starving to death in the next six months. That is equivalent to nearly the entire population of Australia — absolutely astounding in 2017.

Let me focus briefly on South Sudan, Somalia and then Yemen.

In South Sudan, we need to see the Government bring an overdue end to the fighting and improve humanitarian access. It is completely unacceptable that people in famine-affected areas such Mayardit are not receiving the food and medical supplies that could save their lives. These are exactly the messages that we need to keep sending at the highest levels, including at our upcoming meeting on South Sudan chaired by the British Foreign Secretary later this month. We need to match our messages with our money. The United Kingdom is the second-largest bilateral donor to South Sudan, but we cannot do it alone. We are matching our money with our deeds by strengthening the United Nations Mission in South Sudan by almost 400 peacekeepers, including military engineers and a field hospital. We call on others to follow suit.

In Somalia, we have a crucial window to take action before the drought takes hold. If we act early and decisively, we can prevent a repeat of 2011, when more than a quarter of a million people died through famine. Again, we must all play our part. The United Kingdom is providing emergency food and safe drinking water to 1 million people, but more, much more, is needed. If we do not step up, others will. Al-Shabaab is poised to step into the breach left by any lack of national or international resources. If we abandon the people of Somalia, we risk reversing the political and security gains of the past four years by forcing them to turn towards Al-Shabaab in desperation. I therefore strongly urge other donors to come forward.

In Yemen, the situation is equally grave. Civilians are paying the highest price for the continuing conflict, so we urge all sides to facilitate safe access for the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to deliver vital, life-saving assistance. That means that all parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and do everything feasible to prevent civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure, because the continued flow of commercial supplies into Yemen will be critical if we are to prevent famine. Eight-five per cent of Yemen's food needs over the past year have been met through commerical imports. All parties need to ensure the continued facilitation of commercial and humanitarian imports and their onward distribution, while we must continue to support the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen in carrying its out crucial work.

In tandem, we need to find ways to stabilize the banking sector and solve the liquidity crisis so that importers have the means and the funds to pay for foods and basic goods. Again, we need to step up our own

efforts. Last year's United Nations appeal was funded to only 60 per cent; this year, it is only 6 per cent funded. We need to give generously so that that the Resident Coordinator has the resources he needs to tackle the crisis. For our part, the United Kingdom has increased its humanitarian aid to Yemen to $125 million, and in both 2015 and 2016 we helped more than a million Yemenis with food, medical supplies and clean water.

Ultimately, however, it will remain difficult to address Yemen's humanitarian needs while the conflict is ongoing. We call on parties to engage meaningfully with the United Nations Special Envoy's proposals for peace, and to make progress towards a ceasefire and an enduring political settlement. The United Kingdom will continue to play a leading role in supporting his efforts to achieve that.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.